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THE LITTLE PEOPLE
a new novel by
JOHN CHRISTOPHER

ISAAC ASIMOV
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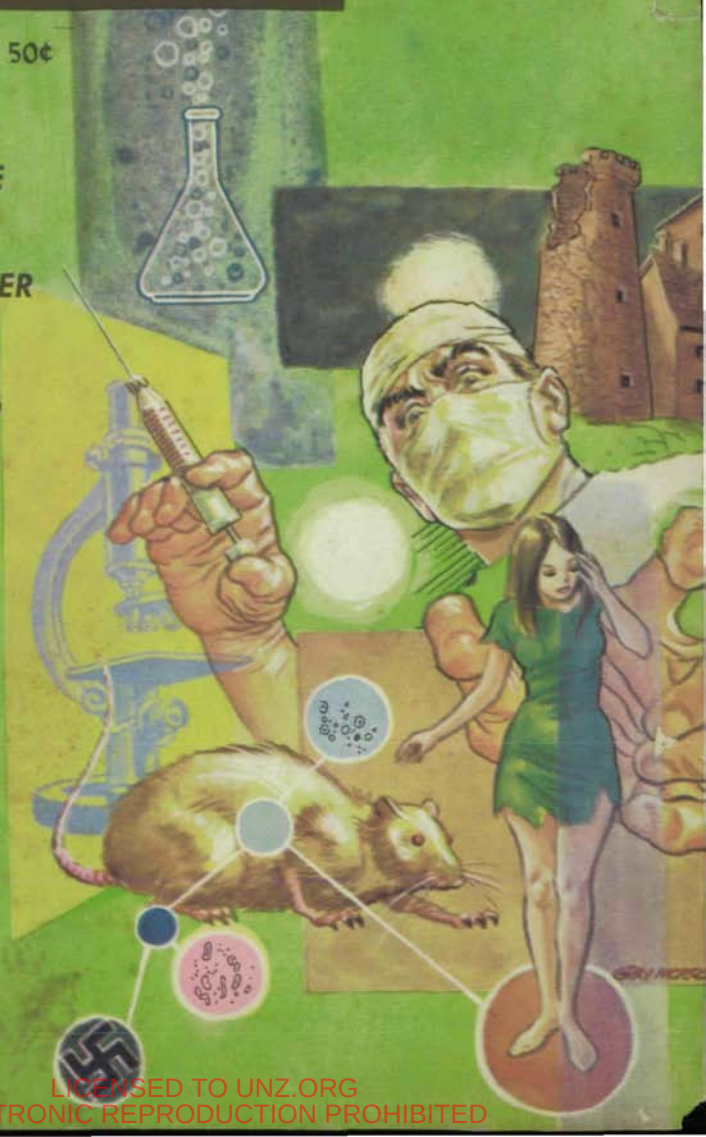

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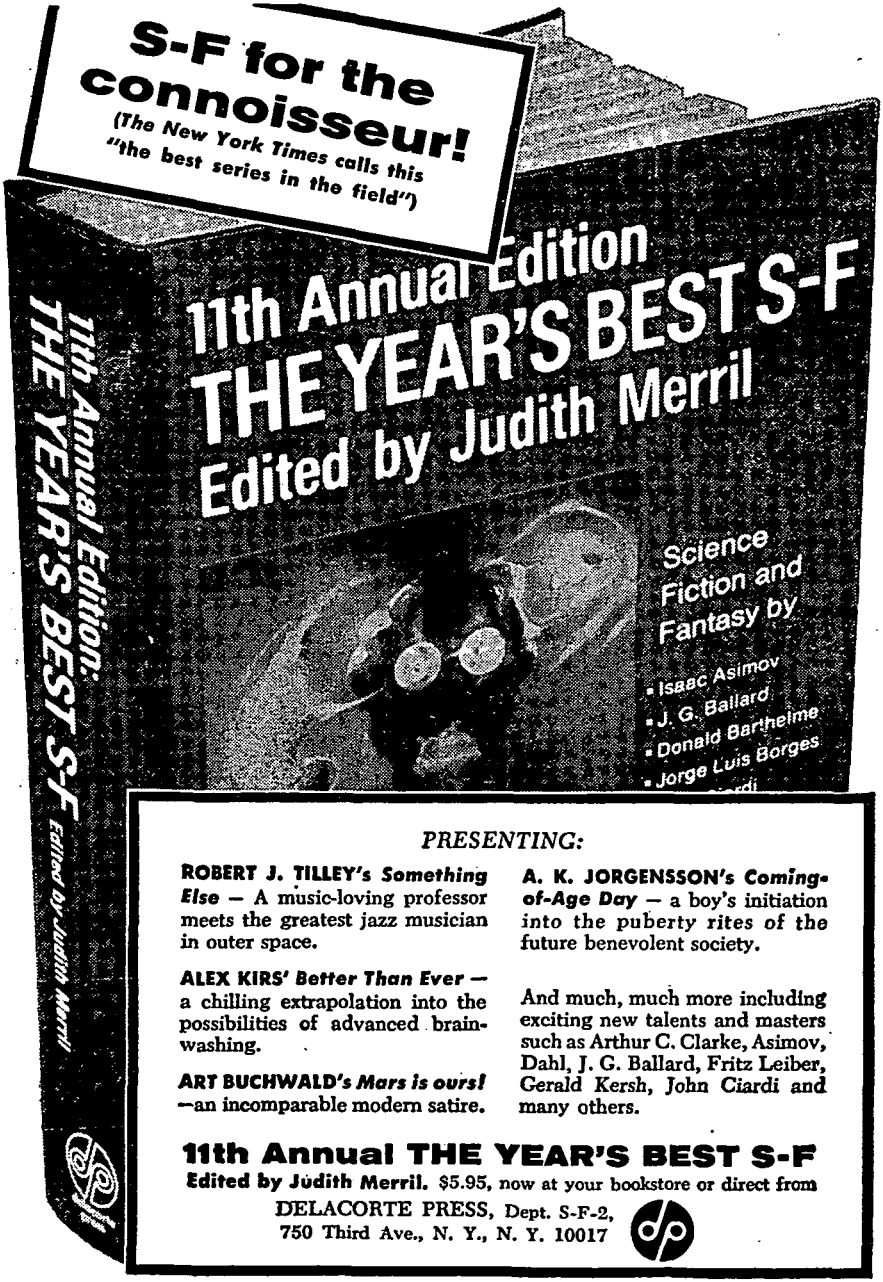
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John Christopher writes that he was born in 1922 in Knowsley, a village on the outskirts of Liverpool, and was involuntarily transported at the age of ten to Hampshire, a move which he long regarded as somewhat equivalent to Dickens' banishment to the blacking factory. He is now settled with his wife and five children, on the island of Guernsey in the English Channel. There, walking children and dog to school in the morning, neglecting a large garden, and playing a local version of pool, he leads a placid and contented existence. Mr. Christopher's novels include NO BLADE OF GRASS, THE LONG WINTER, THE POSSESSORS *and* THE RAGGED EDGE; *and F&SF is pleased to offer his latest—a gripping story about eight impressively realized individuals and their astonishing discovery in an Irish castle.*

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

by John Christopher

(First of three parts)

EITHER O'HANLON & O'HANLON were personally devout, or else they derived a substantial part of their practice from the clergy. The waiting room into which Daniel and Bridget were shown had half a dozen garish oleographs of New Testament scenes on the walls, and the periodicals on the table, apart from *Punch* and *Blackwood's*, were overwhelmingly Catholic. It was a cold, depressing little room, smelling of must and boot polish, and it was a relief when the inner door opened again only a few minutes after the girl had gone through it to announce them. A short, fat, cheerful-seeming man of about sixty came through and greeted them.

"Miss Chauncey," he said. "And this will be Mr. Gillow? I'm Michael O'Hanlon. Will you come into the office and we can have a talk?"

His office was an untidy clutter and had the same prevailing smell, but was warmer at least by reason of a coal fire smouldering behind a heavy mesh screen. A picture on the wall behind his desk showed Christ baring his

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breast to display his Sacred Heart: a precisely heart-shaped object in crimson with a brighter red glow emanating from it. The picture was at least four feet tall. The desk, Daniel noted with disapproval, was strewn with papers in no discernible order. Central amongst them was a large china ash-tray, depicting the lakes of Killarney well obscured by ground-down cigarette butts. The fingers of O'Hanlon's right hand were stained walnut brown. He ushered them into shabby cracked black leather chairs, and offered them Sweet Afton from an inlaid mahogany cigarette box whose marquetry had largely flaked away. Bridget refused, but Daniel accepted. O'Hanlon produced a box of Swan Vesta matches, and lit Daniel's cigarette and his own. He said:

"I see from your card that you're a member of the profession, Mr. Gillow. You'll be acting for Miss Chauncey, I take it. I hope my letter didn't give any sort of wrong impression—that the estate was a large one."

"No," Daniel said, "not that. Miss Chauncey and I are engaged to be married. She is also the secretary of one of my partners. And although, as you know, her father's family was Irish, she had never visited Ireland. It seemed a good excuse for making the trip."

O'Hanlon's eyes were brown and surprisingly big; in a less podgy face they would have seemed enormous. Surveying them warmly, he said:

"I must congratulate you both. And we'll hope that though it's Miss Chauncey's first visit, it will not be the last. Now, you'll be wanting to know what I can tell you about things. Where have I put that file? I had it yesterday, looking at it." He plucked irresolutely at the papers on his desk and then, more purposefully, walked over to a bookshelf and extracted a manilla folder from the top of one of the rows of books. "Ah, I knew it wasn't far away." He returned to his desk, sat down, and opened the file. Here we are. The estate of the late Seamus Chauncey. I believe I told you in my letter that you were named sole heiress, Miss Chauncey, and that the value of the estate was uncertain. Well, it's still uncertain, but I can tell you as far as actual money goes, it's no fortune. By the time the debts are settled, I doubt if there'll be more left than a thousand."

Bridget said: "That's a thousand pounds more than I expected. Our branches of the family have been completely out of touch."

"I know of that. The late Mr. Chauncey spoke of it. There was an estrangement, I believe."

"Between my grandfather and his brother, Sean. My grandfather was in the British Army in the First

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War, and went to live in England afterwards. Sean was an Irish patriot."

"Yes," O'Hanlon said, "but the Troubles are long over, thank God. The old stories are worth preserving, but not the old quarrels. Seamus Chauncey was your father's first cousin, and the last of his line. He had it in mind to write to you before—or to your grandfather, because he knew nothing of you, of course—but this is a terrible country for putting things off. At least, he made his will, and it was simple enough. Everything to your grandfather, or failing him to his eldest, and failing that to the eldest of the eldest. Though as I say, there's little enough, aside from the Castle."

Bridget asked: "The Castle?"

"Well, it's not exactly a castle, though it's called Killabeg Castle and it has some of the old ruins still. It's where Mr. Chauncey lived. It's a biggish house, though."

Daniel said: "Do you know it?"

"No. Mr. Chauncey was not a man for visiting. He came to Dublin no more than once a year, the last few years not even that, and there was no occasion for me to go down to him. It lies in a wild part of Mayo. There's no town within twenty miles, and the nearest railway is more than thirty."

Bridget said: "Grandfather never spoke of Mayo, when he talked about the family. I thought they were all from Cork."

"So they were, as I understand. He would not know about the property in Mayo, because we acted for Mr. Chauncey in the purchase of it, and that was not much more than twenty years ago. He came into this office one hot summer afternoon, and I didn't know him from Adam, and he told me he wanted a solicitor to handle the buying of a house in the west."

Daniel said: "You knew nothing of him before that?"

"I did not."

"Didn't that seem a little unusual?"

"It did. As I say, he came from Cork—you only had to listen to him talk to know it. I asked him if he didn't have a solicitor there, and he said no. I asked him then if he wouldn't prefer to use a local man, and he said what use was there in that, because he was leaving the south and going to live in the property he was buying. Well, it's sense enough that a man would have his affairs handled in Dublin sooner than Ballina."

"References?" Daniel asked.

"A bank reference. He was a warm man. He was paying six thousand pounds for the house—and that was twenty years ago, mark you, when values were very low—and he had plenty to spend on it after. There must have been three or four thousand spent on it in the next few years."

"Six thousand twenty years ago," Daniel said, "and three or

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four thousand on improvements? What would the place be worth now, do you think?"

"Not as much as you might fancy, unfortunately. If he had put the money into property in Dublin, and bought wisely, then you could say twenty five thousand, maybe thirty. And as much or more round Shannon, to the Germans and the Japanese. But the house is at the back of beyond. And what's more, he bought it at the first figure they named. He could have got it for half the price, by waiting and bargaining a bit. But he had to have it right away, for reasons known to God and himself."

"So what sort of value would you put on it, Mr. O'Hanlon?" Bridget asked.

"Ah, now, I'm not in the property business. I have the feeling it's been let go in the last few years, as well. Mr. Chauncey seemed to lose interest in the place, and I suppose the money was tighter. And you would need to find a buyer who liked a lonely spot."

Daniel said: "So it might not be easy to dispose of it."

"It might not." O'Hanlon paused and, drawing in a great sniffing breath, stared at them thoughtfully. "Do you know what I'm thinking, though. Why don't you go and take a look at the place, while you're over here? You'll have no idea without seeing it, and having come so far, you might as well go a bit further."

Daniel said: "The trouble is, we have bookings for the London flight tomorrow evening. And I imagine it would not be easy to get there and back in a day."

"No, it would not. The train journey leaves you thirty miles short, and it must be a hundred and eighty miles by road. I suppose you couldn't manage to stay a day or two longer?"

Daniel said: "I suppose we could manage it. What would you say is the best way of getting there?"

"By motor. No doubt of that. There are not the traffic jams you have in England, at this time of the year especially. You should do it in four hours, with no trouble at all."

"Can you recommend a car-hire firm?"

"Now leave that to me," O'Hanlon said. "I'll arrange all that. Tell me what time you'd like it sent round to the hotel."

"We could get an early start in the morning. Eight thirty, say. Would that be possible?"

O'Hanlon made a note on a dog-eared scratch pad.

"Eight thirty it is."

"Can you suggest anywhere we could stay the night? Is there a hotel in the neighbourhood?"

"Nothing nearer than Ballina. But you won't be needing a hotel. There's staff in the house still, and

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they can look after you. I'll telephone, and let them know that you're coming."

Daniel said: "That's very kind of you."

"No trouble at all. I hope you have a pleasant trip. It's lovely country out there, though you really need to see it in the summer."

As they were leaving, he said to Daniel:

"There was another thing about Mr. Chauncey. I'm not a talking man, you understand, particularly as far as clients are concerned, but he's dead now, God rest him, and you're in the profession yourself."

"What was that?"

"His bank manager here in Dublin was a man by the name of Doonan. He's dead himself these seven years, but I knew him well. He told me Mr. Chauncey's account was only opened the month before he came to me. And opened with a large sum of money, in cash."

"You didn't take it any further?"

"I did not. He seemed an entirely respectable man." O'Hanlon laughed. "Not a train robber, or one of that sort. If there had been reason to look into things, I suppose I might have done. Reason more than vulgar curiosity, that is. But a man's entitled to keep his money in a sock the most of his life if he wants to, and then put it all in the bank at one time, and then buy himself a house in the wilds of Mayo for two or three times what it's worth. Would you not agree with me, Mr. Gillow?"

"Yes," Daniel said, "I would."

They walked quickly back through the cold, grimy, decayed grandeur of the city. A raw February wind blew from the Liffey, bringing a mixture of urban smells but with them the smell of the sea. The hotel bar was warm and pleasant, a soft cocoon. There was a mirror behind, in which Daniel could see the reflections of Bridget and himself. They made, he told himself a little smugly, a good couple. Bridget with her soft auburn hair, grey candid eyes, good nose, above all the flawless skin. And he himself a not unreasonable foil to her. Regular features, above average height, the mouth thinner than he would have liked—nothing exceptional, but he would pass. And, what was more important, the lover and husband-to-be of a very beautiful girl.

Bridget said: "I wonder how he did make it."

"The money? Who knows? Twenty years ago was the time after the war. There were all kinds of money about then."

"And to buy a house in Mayo. Why?" Daniel shrugged. "Can we rely on O'Hanlon to fix the car, do you think?"

"I should think so. He probably has a friend in the business. It will turn up some time. I said eight thirty to be sure we had a chance of getting off by ten."

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They were still breakfasting the following morning when the waiter brought a message. Mr. O'Hanlon presented his compliments, and the car was waiting. Daniel looked at his watch. The time was twenty five minutes past eight.

He said: "My God! I don't believe it, but I suppose we'd better get moving. Are you all ready?"

She nodded. "I packed before I came down."

"I'll go and deal with the desk, then. See you in the lobby."

There was a black Zephyr outside, some years old and, though clean, showing signs of wear and tear. A young man in his middle twenties was standing by it. He was tall and well built, with black curly hair—one of the handsome black Irish. At the same time, there was something familiar about him. Daniel said:

"Sorry we've kept you waiting."

"That's all right." He smiled. "You shouldn't have worried. We've time enough." He put his hand out. "I'm Mat O'Hanlon."

The familiarity resolved itself; one could trace the podgy features of the father in the son's good looks. Daniel said:

"Of course. I'm Daniel Gillow, and this is Miss Chauncey. It was very good of you to bring the car. Have you got the documents?" The young man looked blank. "For hiring."

"Ah, I see what you mean. It's not a hired car, though. We thought it would be easier altogether for me to drive you up there."

Daniel was taken aback. "That's too great an imposition, Mr. O'Hanlon. After all, it's nearly two hundred miles. I'm sure it would be best if we hired a car. The porter . . ."

"It's no trouble. I was looking for something to do this weekend. And I may get some fishing in. I believe there's a bit of a lake there." He grinned widely. "Anyway, I've put my rod in."

II

Mat took a hand off the car wheel, to point.

"That will be it."

"Where?"

"In the distance, there."

She saw it as he spoke. It looked like a church at first sight, a nave joined to a Saxon round tower with a broken top. But so isolated. A ribbon of road ran towards it and ended there. A glimpse of what might be water on the far side of it, but all about a black sullen featureless landscape with, as far as she could see, not even one small hump to challenge the monotony.

Mat said: "That's the bog of Killabeg. It would have been a lake once, I suppose. There's a patch of water left, behind the house."

Daniel said: "Why would anyone want to build a house in the middle of a bog?"

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"There was a rath there, in the first place. An earthfort, that is. Someone built it as an outpost, maybe, or as a place to take back plunder to. It would be hard to find a way through the bog before the road was there, which would make the place easier to defend. Later there was a castle, which Cromwell's men found useful when they wanted to keep a garrison here for subduing the country. And after that the castle fell down, or was pulled down, and someone built the house."

The road wound down and down, and they came to a place where a pair of impressive stone pillars, ten or twelve feet high, stood on the right. They may have carried a gate at one time, but there was no sign of it now, and no apparent reason why a gate, or the pillars for that matter, should have been there. The track which went between them was of hard-packed stone and earth; it meandered across the flat emptiness of the bog to the house, a mile or so away.

The car jolted forward onto the track. Mat said:

"Hard on the springs. I think you'd need a Land Rover, if you were living here."

Daniel shook his head. "Even with a Land Rover, it doesn't bear thinking of."

She took in more details of the house as they approached. It was a very odd building. On the left there was the round tower with its broken and crumbling battlement. The structure joined to it, vaguely Georgian in appearance, was on two floors, with a roof level much below the tower's rim. The two parts, separately fairly ordinary, together made up a monstrosity, whose hybrid ugliness was accentuated by the featurelessness of the surroundings. It was a relief to see smoke rising from a couple of the chimneys; the place looked deserted.

There was a housekeeper in residence, and a girl. Mrs. Malone was a small dumpy woman, about forty, wearing a black dress and showing something of the nervous brashness that, in the Irish, often serves as a cloak for timidness and sensitivity. The girl—of fifteen or sixteen, Bridget judged—was called Mary. She was a thin, shy, fearful creature, very much dominated by Mrs. Malone. The latter showed Bridget up to her room.

It was large and well proportioned, the ceiling covered with an elaborate criss-cross pattern in ribbed plaster. There was a large patch of damp at the top of one wall, but otherwise it seemed to be in good order structurally. The paper, she thought, was unusual for this kind of house in this country: a latticework of grey rods, lightly splotched with red. There were four pictures, none of them with a religious provenance. Unless one counted a reproduction of

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Boeklen's "Isle of the Dead" as religious. A couple of Alpine scenes —indifferently executed original oils—were also on the melancholy side, but pleasanter. She found a signature: V. Chauncey, '27. The other had the same name and was dated the following year. Some one of her unknown relations, she supposed, who had gone on holiday to Switzerland or Austria. She stared at them, frowning. There was something wrong about that. It didn't fit, any more than the notion of Seamus Chauncey buying this house fitted.

Excluding the tower, the house was split longitudinally by the hall and main stairs, latitudinally by a corridor whose natural lighting came obscurely from fanlights above the doors of the rooms leading off and also from a long window at the south end. At the north end, there was a massive door. There were four rooms at the front, two on either side of the hall, but only those in the southern half—the dining room and a room in which they had had coffee—were furnished. The rest were bare even of carpets and curtains, with faded flowered wallpaper and, in the further one, large patches of damp.

Facing the dining room were the back stairs and the door leading to the kitchen and staff quarters. They left those, hearing the distant chink of washing up from behind the tattered green baize of the door, and examined the other rooms at the rear of the house. There were three, the two at the end, like their counterparts in front, completely bare, the third a library. It had glassed bookshelves on two walls, four club chairs, and a long couch covered in brown leather. There were paintings of sailing ships on the walls and a half-size billiards table at one end; at the other, a mahogany study table with three upright chairs that looked like Chippendale but were, Bridget decided, almost certainly worthless copies.

The main stairs, of dark oak with a roughly carved balustrade, turned on themselves at the half floor, and opened onto a landing with a stained glass window directly above the front door. The glass, at least, belonged to the Ascendancy: St. George, with the sun almost haloing his head, had his spear stuck into a small but ugly-looking dragon. The dragon was green and St. George flaunted a shield in which the red cross was very bright indeed.

The staff sleeping quarters were above the kitchen. There were eight other bedrooms, four at the front and four smaller ones at the back. Nevertheless, the visitors had put considerable strain on the resources available. Only two rooms—one at the front and one at the back—were adequately furnished. Another front room held a shaky looking bed, a marble-

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topped wash-stand, a rickety table and a broken-backed chair. Mat had taken this, leaving the smaller, more comfortable bedroom to Daniel.

This was smaller than Bridget's and different in other ways also. The bed was taller and narrower, looking as though it dated from the days when brass knobs first began to give way to wood. The rest of the furniture was in keeping, and the pictures on the walls either printed views of glens and mountains or family photographs. There was one group, taken in a studio, with the ladies seated on a high bench, the men standing behind and the children cross-legged on the floor or bunched at the sides, which could have been of the right age to feature her grandfather as a boy. Bridget hunted for a resemblance to the gaunt old pipe-smoking man, but without success. She turned from that to look out of the window.

As in all the views from the house, the bog predominated, stretching out to the distant hills, but nearer at hand were the gardens and the lake. Gardens was a euphemism; they might have been impressive once but were in poor shape now. Lawns directly behind the house had rioted into long grass, in which a couple of oaks and a twisted cypress were hunched. There was also a ramshackle summerhouse with a hole in the roof. Further off a brick wall enclosed half an acre or so of flower beds and scrub, and some ragged fruit trees clung to the inside of it. That stood level with the house seventy or eighty yards away, and there was a glimpse, further still, of what looked like a kitchen garden, enclosed by a hedge. The lake lay at an angle to all this.

The back stairs, narrow and covered with a threadbare red carpet, led down as well as up. There was a light switch which Bridget, forgetfully, flicked with her finger. Nothing happened, of course.

Mat said: "We could get a paraffin lamp from Mrs. Malone, if you wanted to go down."

She stared into the black well. "I don't think so." Turning away, she encountered the heavy door at the end of the corridor. "We could have a look at the tower, though."

There was an iron ring in the door, which she grasped and turned. The door did not budge, even when she put her shoulder to it and pressed. Daniel said: "Let me have a go," and tried with the same result.

"Locked," he said.

"I'll get the key," Mat said, "from Mrs. Malone."

She came out from the kitchen with him. The key was a fairly massive one. She said:

"I forgot you'd myabe want to go into the tower. It's a question of habit, you understand. Mr. Chauncey always kept the door

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locked when he was alive, and I've done the same since he died."

"Did he keep things in the tower?" Bridget asked.

"As to that, you'll see." She shook her head. "I was never inside it till he died. Ah, that was a terrible day."

"It was his heart, wasn't it?" Bridget asked.

"A stroke he had," Mrs. Malone said, "and him in there at the time. He was mostly in there of a morning. He was late for his lunch that day, but he sometimes was. Then Mary said she could hear noises from behind the door here—kind of humping, banging noises. And there was no way for me to get in, with there only being the one key. I called to him through the door, but it's thick enough, and all I heard was a kind of groaning back to me. I was at my wit's end with it. I was thinking of taking an axe to it when I heard the key in the lock. Even then it was long enough before he managed to turn it. And when we got the door open, he collapsed in my arms. He'd had the stroke in the room up there, and managed to crawl down the stairs. He could hardly speak, but he was mumbling about the key. I suppose he'd thought of being trapped in there, and no-one able to get to him. I told him there was nothing to worry about now, that the key was in the lock and the door open, but he kept on about it. He died in my arms."

"A grim experience for you," Daniel said.

"It was that, sir. I'm used to death, but I've always known it to come decent in the past. I went up there once, but I thought it best to leave his playthings, and so I locked the door again, and hung the key up till Mr. O'Hanlon asked for it just now. Is there anything else that you might want?"

Daniel shook his head. "Thank you. Nothing else."

The door opened onto a spiral staircase which wound upwards to the right, downwards to the left. Some light filtered down, but not much. Daniel said:

"Perhaps we should have asked her for a lamp, after all."

"We can manage without," Bridget said. Daniel started to climb, and she followed with Mat bringing up the rear. "What did she mean by playthings, do you think?"

Daniel's voice echoed down to her. "I've no idea. Be interesting to find out."

The walls were massively thick. They reached and passed the source of light, an embrasure opening onto a look-out covered by a rusting iron cross-piece. The thickness was over three feet at that point. The stairs wound on, and there was a door on the right, something like the one below. It had a large brass lock, but stood ajar. Daniel pushed it open, and they went in.

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The room was circular, and took up the whole of the inside of the tower—it was getting on for forty feet across. It was naturally lit by half a dozen slits spaced equidistantly round the walls; but in these cases, Bridget saw, the openings at the end had glass and some kind of metal screen covering them. There were also electric lights and an electric power supply to a work-bench. The place was a fantastic mixture of workroom and living room. She saw chairs, a divan bed, a small electric cooker, quite a large sink, a pile of metal cages, a foot square, stacked one above the other, and a conglomeration of tools on and around the work-bench—a vice, power drill, grinding wheel, all sorts. Her eye took in these things briefly, drawn past them to the real oddity, which occupied about a third of the room on the far side: a village of doll's houses.

Daniel said: "So that's what she meant by playthings."

Bridget went across to examine them. They were miniature chalets, some two feet high, and there were more than a dozen of them, some set flush with the wall, others on the tangent of the arc. They were painted in various colours—yellow, red, blue, different shades of green, and she saw that many had tiny boxes in front of them, in which there was earth and at one time had been plants: all, apart from a couple of yellowish succulents, were withered and dead. Bending down, she looked through one of the windows in the nearest chalet. What she saw gave her a shock of surprise. She was looking into a bedroom, with bedroom furniture scaled down to fit. She called Daniel, and showed him. He looked, and nodded.

"He took his obsession pretty seriously."

"Obsession?"

"What else? Doll's houses—like some old men play with toy soldiers."

"But how did the furniture get in there, and in place? That wardrobe—it's a foot high—that wouldn't go through the window."

"He had some fairies who assembled it inside." He was grinning. "Look."

There were hinges on one side, painted to blend with the wood. Daniel felt on the other side, under the eaves, and clicked a catch. He lifted and pulled, and the roof swung up and over. The rooms underneath lay open and exposed.

"Well made," Daniel said. "He was something of a carpenter."

Mat said: "He was that. He took a lot of trouble. You mostly get things varying with doll's furniture—a lot of it matching and then maybe a saucepan as big as a grand piano. But I don't see anything of that sort here."

"Daniel said: "Consistency is a very usual feature of certain kinds of monomania. The scale's about

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one to five. That bed's about a foot long."

"How old was he?" Bridget said. "Forty five? It's rather pathetic, isn't it?"

Daniel had put the roof back on the chalet and gone over to the work-bench. He said:

"Some funny tools amongst this lot."

Bridget said: "Let's go. I don't care for this place."

Her words came out more emphatically than she had intended. Daniel said:

"There's always something upsetting about the recluse, isn't there? Though this one seems to have been mild enough. Doll's houses. There could be a lot worse things than that to mess with."

"I suppose so," she said. "Anyway, we've seen enough, haven't we? There isn't much here as far as selling the place is concerned."

"Sound-proofed workshop with power and plumbing laid on?" Daniel suggested. "No, I can't see it making a great deal of difference."

He stood aside to let her go down. Mat said:

"And it's a thin market for doll's houses. In these parts, at any rate." He glanced up at the window slits. "I wonder why he put the screens across the windows?"

"To keep out mosquitoes in hot weather," Daniel said.

"The mesh isn't close enough for that."

"Bats, then," Daniel said. "He was afraid the bats might come in and colonize his village. Makes a lot of sense if you look at it the right way."

The evening meal was as dreadful as lunch had been, the first course consisting of fatty cold meat and burned boiled potatoes. Afterwards, Mrs. Malone produced an apple pie which, she told them, she had made that afternoon. The pastry was thick, board-hard on top and slimily soggy underneath, and the apple had been spiced with cloves to a point where it tasted of nothing else. They ate what they could of this and refused the offer of coffee.

Bridget was suddenly tired, and bade them goodnight. As she left, she heard Daniel extolling the Irish virtues as beacons of light in a dark century. Mat was listening, but seemingly without much interest.

There was a lamp in the hall, on a table outside the drawing room, and another at the foot of the main stairs. She had a moment or two of unease, walking alone along the shadowy passage, and again on the stairs. Another lamp had been set up on the landing. It was natural, of course. People were no longer accustomed to the shades, the partial revelations, of lamp and candle light. But there was nothing to fear here, not even the ghost of Cousin Seamus. If

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that walked anywhere it would be in the tower room, among the tiny houses.

It was better in her bedroom. The fire that Mrs. Malone had promised had been lit and glowed warmly. A lamp was burning here, too, beside her bed, a pretty one with folds and convolutions of rose-coloured glass. Her sheets had been folded back, and the curtains drawn against the night. There was a feeling of cosiness and security. Suddenly and strangely, she felt at home.

In the departure lounge at the airport, Mat said:

"I hope we'll be seeing you again. Maybe you'll come over for the honeymoon."

Daniel smiled. "That's an idea."

Though, in fact, they were to go to Rome: Daniel had it all planned, down to the hotel. They were called for embarkation, and waved goodbye. It was black and cloudy, threatening rain again.

During the flight she was mostly silent. Daniel made an effort to talk at the beginning, but her brief replies discouraged him and sent him to *The Times*. She sat back in her seat, eyes closed, listening to the enveloping throb of the engines, and tried to talk herself out of the idea which had progressively engrossed her during the day. She went over the arguments against it, trying not to think of the one irrational argument in favour. Sleep on it at least, she told herself. Say nothing now.

But while he was driving her home from Heathrow, she said:

"Darling."

"Yes."

"I think I might leave the firm earlier than I planned. Right away, in fact."

He glanced at her. "Of course. Mother would be very much in favour." He said thoughtfully: "We could bring things forward altogether."

"I'm thinking of the house. I might not sell it."

"We couldn't afford to keep it up." He eased the Sceptre into the fast lane. "You've no idea the kind of drain it would be."

"I was thinking of running it as a commercial proposition."

Daniel laughed. "How, precisely?"

"As a country hotel. Well, guest house."

"That's a bit fantastic, isn't it? It's not as though you've ever done anything in that line."

"I think I might manage."

He paused before replying. "Are you serious?"

"I think so. Yes. I am."

"With Mrs. Malone's country cooking?"

"Well, no. I would handle the cooking myself. I like it, and I'm not bad at it."

"Isn't it situated a bit far out?"

"Mat says that would be an advantage. People who holiday in

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Ireland want to get out in the wilds."

"Was this his idea?"

"Yes. But it makes sense. I'd get little or nothing for the house as it stands. If I ran it for a season, there would be a much better chance of selling it reasonably. It would make no real difference as far as we're concerned. I would be clear by October."

He said flatly: "You would never do it in time. It would take ages to get into shape."

"A couple of months. If I tackled it right away, I could take guests from the beginning of May."

"And it would need money."

There was a warning note in his voice: don't expect me to back you in this kind of lunacy. Bridget said:

"I've got enough, even without what's coming from Cousin Seamus."

"Have I got this right?" he asked. "You're thinking of leaving me next week, say, and I shan't see you again until the wedding, or near enough?"

"It needn't be so long. You could come over for your holiday."

They drove the rest of the way to her flat in silence. She said:

"Coming up for a coffee?"

"No, thanks. We're both tired."

He helped her out, and kissed her but not warmly. He said:

"We'll talk about things tomorrow."

She heard him drive off, revving fast, as she put her key in the door. He was quite angry with her, understandably she thought. He was also confident that when he brought pressure to bear she would come round. She felt a little angry with herself, knowing she would not.

III

There had been a savage row—the worst for months—only two days before they sailed. They had been to a party at the Greenbergs, and something had started Helen off on her Arab kick. It was partly Manny Greenberg's fault for making such strong Martinis and hovering round to freshen glasses before they were empty, but that explained rather than excused things. He watched her with a quiet sick hatred as she stood there, clutching her glass, her tinted blonde hair escaping from its elaborate setting, and ranted on about the Bedu. She talked about the good times on the Gulf in the old days, the splendid Standard Oil life with Daddy from which he had taken her away. Waring Selkirk tried to remember what she had been like, how she had looked and sounded eighteen years ago. She had looked better, certainly, with a good hard figure and a pretty enough face, but no prettier than a score of other girls he had known. And that voice had been

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the same: harsh and flat and inclined to get loud when she was excited. The voice should have been enough. But he had thought her *intellectual,* for God's sake. He had thought she had an interesting mind. She had talked about the Bedu then, in just the same way, and he had been fascinated by it.

But she was older now, and fatter, and drunker, and she was in the Greenbergs' house with the Cohns standing listening as well. He looked at her over Julie Bennit's shoulder, and tried to make some sense of what Julie was telling him about her miniature Yorkshire—it was a hysteric, or something—but her little drawl was lost in the surge of babble from across the room. He stuck it until she started on the Palestine refugees, and then broke loose from Julie with some kind of apology and went across and cut into her tirade with the announcement that it was time they went home: they needed to have an early night with everything to be got ready for the trip tomorrow.

Helen gave him a blank look. Despite its massive confusion her mind worked quickly on occasions like this; she was calculating, he knew, the relative advantages to her image of an open fight at the Greenbergs or an acquiescence. She chose the latter. The fight started the moment he got the car out of the driveway. It continued, with growing bitterness, during the twenty minutes it took them to get home, and reached screaming pitch during the next half hour. At its height, he heard the front door open, and said: "That's Cherry. Shut up, will you?" But Cherry, of course, did not matter the way people at the Greenbergs did; if anything she screeched louder. Waring turned from her. The front door closed as he got out on the landing. He was going to go after her, to call her back, but Helen had come out of the bedroom and gripped his arm, her nails digging into him. She hung onto him until it was too late, and he accused her of not caring about Cherry, not giving a damn what happened to her, and that started the physical violence. She tried her best to choke him, and he had to straight-arm her to knock her off. She fell heavily, howled (like one of those goddam pi-dogs she used to talk about), and then, as though picking up the unspoken comparison, grabbed at him and bit him in the leg. He kicked himself free this time, looked at her sprawled and groaning on the floor, and thought: *intellectual.*

She quieted in the end, and locked herself in the bedroom. There was a bed made up in the guest room, but he had no pyjamas in there, not that sleeping raw worried him. Waring poured himself a whisky, and pulled up his trouser to examine his leg. It was

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quite painful, and there was going to be a lulu of a bruise, but at least she had not drawn blood. No need to cauterize, he thought, and tried to grin. He put some Haydn on the record player and waited for Cherry to come back.

He had a long wait; it was quarter after eleven before the door opened again. He did not ask her where she had been, and she did not volunteer any information. She was pale and beautiful, and after all the waiting he had nothing to say to her, nor she to him. She went upstairs, and he heard her footsteps stop by their bedroom door, but she did not knock and a moment later went on to her own room. He thought of the idea behind this vacation trip; a chance to get away from the whole tangle into which they had gotten. It might do something for her. And for him. And Cherry. It seemed laughable right now. The mess you had made of your life was not a piece of baggage you could mark "Not Wanted On Voyage." He sat five or ten minutes more staring at nothing before he went up himself.

The following day, Waring was placatory and Helen, though she snarled at him from time to time, for the most part merely sullen. The improvement continued. She was excited by the embarkation. Cherry seemed happy, too, in her quiet, silently smiling way. Times like these, Waring had the conviction that life was not an inevitable progression from ruin to disaster, that there were points on the road where you could call a halt, find a way back.

Things stayed pretty good for the duration of the voyage. There was one day of rough weather, which knocked Waring out and gave Helen a chance to patronize him—she had travelled a lot by sea as a child, accompanying her parents to far parts of the world, and boasted that she had never been sea-sick. Apart from that, she found a couple of buddies who were prepared to listen to the carousel as she whirled about on her hobby-horses. They were going on to France, and before the ship docked at Cobh there was a great to-do of exchanging addresses and promises to keep in touch. Waring knew what that would lead to: long intimate letters from Helen which would surprise and flatter the recipients into fairly quick replies, provoking, by return mail, even longer letters. Which this time seemed too much of a good thing; the recollection of the hours sitting in deck chairs or round the bar was fading, and Helen's letters, it must be faced, were not only long but dull. There might be a short noncommittal note, some time later, but long before that Helen had suffered one more disillusionment. To be taken out, Waring thought, in the usual quarter.

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Her euphoria, though, was rapidly eroded by the trials of disembarkation and by a nightmarish journey north in a decrepit hired car, and had gone completely by the time their destination came in sight. They had come through the hills, and on the right lay exposed a saucer of barren land. The low clouds which covered the hill tops trailed rain over it: a dark sky pressed down on a black sodden country. Waring could just make out a tiny regular shape in the middle of it all.

Helen had seen it, as well. She said:

"Good Christ, I don't believe it! Even you couldn't have picked a spot like that for a vacation. Well, by God, you can stay here yourself. Cherry and I are moving out tomorrow. Well go to Morocco, like I wanted to do. At least, we'll get some sun."

She was sullen and angry after they got to the house, looking for things to pick on and finding them in small details: their room was cold, she didn't like the drapes, or the soap provided, and the bed wasn't soft enough. But he saw her interest caught by their fellow guests. There was the young Irishman, Mat O'Hanlon, who was Bridget Chauncey's attorney from Dublin, and who seemed to be helping her get things running, and there was a German couple called Morwitz. The husband, Stefan, was large-framed, very blonde, with a basically good physique which, although he was certainly no older than Waring himself, was running to seed. The wife, Hanni, was a small, still pretty dark woman. When they went up to bed, Helen said:

"What do you think of them—the Morwitzes?"

"They seem O.K."

"It's a surprising combination."

"Do you think so?"

"You don't expect a big handsome German Aryan, which he must have been, to marry a Jewess."

"Is she Jewish?"

"Of course she is. It stands out a mile."

She might be right. All that mattered, anyway, was that the couple had intrigued her. Nothing had been said, for the past hour or two, about moving on. And she was entirely capable of clearing off with Cherry, which would mean he had to go, too—a humiliating defeat and one likely to lead to more, apart from being in itself exhausting. He made some noncommittal remarks, and she went on, about the Morwitzes, about their hostess, about the Irishman. Bridget wore an engagement ring. Helen speculated about that, and about her being younger than she had expected—very young for this kind of thing.

Her conversation was mild and friendly, the virulent abuse of earlier in the day forgotten as though

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it had been spoken twenty years ago. Gradually, something else crept into it, which Waring reluctantly recognized. He had been undressing—she was already in bed —and she said:

"Stand still." He looked at her in inquiry. "You've got a good body, honey," she said. "You look after yourself well. Not like that German." She propped herself on an elbow. "You know, you're quite something for a man of your years. I have to give you credit for that, if nothing else."

The summons was unmistakeable. It was, he supposed, possible to refuse, at the expense of another outburst of fishwife's vituperation, and the probability of her carrying out her expressed intention of taking Cherry away. He went, mechanically smiling, towards her bed. You became an old man in the mind, he thought, however much you do towards keeping the body in trim.

He wanted peace, he told himself; he had to have it. It was for that reason he was committing this obscene act. The rain slashed heavily against the windows.

Waring awoke later with a need to go to the bathroom. He usually kept a torch beside his bed because Helen objected to lights being switched on when she was asleep. This time he had omitted to put it out, but it did not matter because the room was full of moonlight. He found his slippers and dressing gown, and went out quietly.

When he returned, he could see she was still sleeping, her face child-like and defenseless against the pillow. He went to the window. Their bedroom was at the back of the house; there was the garden and the lake, further off the level plain and distant hills, and a moon nearly full standing above them. He had not bothered to put on his spectacles, and his myopia turned the scene into a soft wash of grey and silver haze, differing shades of lawn and lake and bogland swimming into each other, with a few dim indeterminate trees and bushes. A Chinese painting? He stared at it. Normally his eyes strained for clarity and resolution, but these bright shapeless shadows contented him. He was alone and at ease in the night. He felt a faint tug of memory, a half recollection of a happiness long ago and far away. From his childhood: no one scene, but he could remember the sense of an amorphous, magic world, whose edges trembled with implications. Before he was nine, then—before they found out why he was doing badly at school and took him to an oculist.

What he could remember very well was his feeling when he put the spectacles on. Everything at once clearer, harsher, uglier. Faces that lost their gentleness,

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their pleasant vagueness, and became clear and distorted—with the marks of anger, discontent, cruelty. Was that the way it had seemed to him then, or was it his later interpretation of a child's confusion at a world suddenly leaping into reality? There had been an awareness of loss, though: he remembered that. He could even remember working hard at school in an attempt, surprisingly adult he saw now, to forget it, to put the dim dear world behind him.

It was an odd thing that he had never thought of trying to go back, of mislaying the spectacles or breaking them. He had known that it was not possible, that happiness came by chance and by default. In fact his adult life had seen a continuous battle with opticians, and their unrelenting determination to under-prescribe for myopia. If he had to see the world as it was, he wanted to see it sharply, warts and all.

Something moved out there, by the walled garden. An animal. A fox? He thought not. Something that raised itself up. Did badgers do that? Was this badger country? He strained his weak unaided eyes, peering at it. Not as big as a grown badger, either. A squirrel? Too big for that. It moved across the field of moonlight, in a way both strange and familiar. Waring stared for another long moment, then walked quickly to the bedside table for his spectacles. Curiosity was stronger than enchantment.

The world took on hard shape again. The room first—a small stain on the carpet, a stubbed and twisted cigarette in the ash-tray, the lines, harsh even when smoothed out by sleep, in Helen's face. And outside—the cypress tree black and malignant, the surface of the lake bearing shadows beneath the lucent silver, the stark desolation of the bog. He looked where he had seen the moving shape, but there was nothing. It would have gone on, of course; he had been away for a second or two. He looked for it beneath the oaks, by the lake. Nothing. And then a flicker at the corner of his vision. Over towards the tower. He caught it for one small instant, before it was lost behind the garages. He went on staring, in shock and excitement. It was nonsense, of course, an hallucination. The whole country was hallucinated, and had been for centuries.

He realized he must have cried out when he heard the movement from the bed behind him. Helen sat up, brushing the hair out of her eyes. She said:

"What's the matter with you, for God's sake?"

IV

At home, Stefan arose punctually at six thirty, the moment Hanni's little alarm clock went

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off. He showered, shaved, had a large breakfast, and drove the ten kilometres to Munich in time to be at the store a few minutes before it opened at eight. It was a routine which he maintained scrupulously, and loathed wholeheartedly. On holiday he could be his true self, the idler, the master of the clock without hands. He had explained this to the English girl when he arrived, and she had been understanding. Breakfast could be kept for him, an egg fried fresh and new coffee made when he was ready for it. Though in fact there had been no need to take advantage of that offer. For all his luxurious rollings over in bed, protracted wallowing in the bath, the deliberate delays, he found himself hungry and waiting in the dining room at just about the time the shutters would be going up at the Stefan Morwitz stores, in Munich and Frankfurt and Bonn.

But after that there was a difference, a day happily empty of people, of buyers and sellers in whose faces, as in mirrors, he saw his own lines of cupidity and anxiety deepen day by day. There were the people in the hotel, of course, the staff, his fellow guests, but one could walk away from them into a quiet open country. This he did, relishing, even in the almost continuous rain, the wild bare land of bog and hills. He had been disappointed at first to find that there was only one passable route from the house, that the first two and the last two kilometres must always be the same, but he had quickly grown used to this, and even enjoyed it. One walked by the side of the rough road through gusts of blinding rain and between the gusts there was the landscape, always the same and yet infinitely variable: the waste of bog, the subtly changing hills. He studied the bog, its hillocks and hollows, the ponds, the stretches of black mud, the patches of heath where a few plants and flowers grew. He had been warned about that—one could go for a short way into the bog in places but it was all deceptive, all treacherous. The only safety lay on the road that wound through it, narrow and stony, surrounded by the morass with its pools and islands, its immensity. By that slender way, a man came through, to the open hillsides, and so again to house and home.

Beyond lay a wild bare moorland, rock and scrub and heather rising to the wet grey sky. The ground, where it was not stony, was soft underfoot; where grass grew it was of an emerald brightness scarcely to be believed. He liked this country, more than Norway the previous year, more than the Dolomites, the Pyrenees, the Abruzzi. He had turned to the north, he told himself, because so many of his countrymen went south—on a brown hillside in

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Catalonia, thinking himself alone, he had crossed a spur and found a whole family basking in the sun, mother shapeless, daughter blonde pigtailed, father and two sons in lederhosen. But he thought now there was something else. He had felt it in Norway: not an answer, but the stirring in himself of a kind of questioning, a sense of something to be found. He was aware of it here still more strongly. A land of age, he thought, and innocence.

He stepped out resolutely, and found himself humming a tune. It was a melody that came from his boyhood, from walking with companions through strong, harsh sunlight—long cloudless days, ending in a dusk of campfire smoke and tiredness, singing, the unquestioned, unquestioning assurance of comradeship. But that was Germany, he thought, and the boy who walked there so long ago was very young.

In the evening, Bridget contrived to be with her guests during the hour preceding dinner. Stefan admired her for it as for other ways in which she concealed the hard work which went into looking after things. The arrival of her fiance, Daniel, that afternoon had made no difference to this. She chatted with them, over a glass of sherry. "There's something I've been meaning to ask you about, Herr Morwitz."

"I will be happy to answer, if I can."

"It's this notebook. I found it when we were clearing things up, a couple of months ago, and put it on one side. It turned up again today. My German is very weak, and the handwriting defeats me utterly."

It had a limp green leather cover, and the pages inside were blue ruled and of good quality paper. The entries, in black ink, were in in a small, spiky, elegant hand. At the top of the first page, it said "Juli 5", but there was no year.

"It is a journal," Stefan said.

Bridget nodded. "Yes, a diary. I've no idea whose. I don't suppose it matters reading it when one has no idea who wrote it. Do you?"

It was, he realized, part of the technique for keeping guests happy and at ease. She could, of course, have shown it to Hanni while he was out, but she would see Hanni as a person essentially contented, him as the restless one to be kept interested and amused.

He said: "One needs privacy only from one's friends. It was in this house when you came here, you say? And you have no idea of the origin?"

"None. The house belonged to a cousin of mine; as far as I know he had no German connections. There were a few other German things in the house, though—pictures and such."

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Stefan had been glancing over the first page, and a sentence caught his eye. "There is no excuse for failure, no extenuation, no justification in remorse." He felt an automatic sympathy for the man who had written that, a quickening of interest. He looked up at Bridget.

"You would like me to translate?"

"I thought it would be interesting to have some idea of what it's all about."

"A moment, please."

The handwriting, difficult on first sight, was less formidable when examined more closely. Stefan found he could read it fairly easily.

"The good weather continues, and has lasted for several days now. S. complains of the heat, but I find it no hotter than a spring day in Munich. The dampness remains in the air, and a breeze springs up from time to time and makes it almost cold in the shade. I am grateful for what warmth there is. I remember such a day as this, long ago, during the Maifest, when I was a young man, when V. was in Germany for the first time and we swam in love. It is strange. Up to a point, life widens out, prospect opening up prospect, seemingly limitless. And then, with no warning, comes contraction. The horizons draw in, one is hedged about by the bitterness of one's errors and defeats. This emotion must be resisted, of course. There is no excuse for failure, no extenuation, no justification in remorse. But self-discipline cannot restore the clear eye of youth: it is lost, with the leaping blood, the tensed and ready sinew. Thank God there remains work, to give a purpose and meaning to existence. Without that, what? The destiny of S.—a continual seeking of oblivion in a bottle, a succession of drunken nights and hideous retching mornings? I despise him utterly, but I recognize that he has chosen his fate less than it had chosen him."

Stefan translated it, as well as he could. He paused, and said:

"I cannot express it very well in English, you understand. That is where the page ends. Do you wish . . . ?"

"Don't bother now." She put her hand out for the book. "It seems very ordinary. Rather sentimental and melodramatic."

"That is probably my bad translating. I find it interesting. You know nothing of him? An elderly German living here, and from my own city of Munich. And working? What sort of work would that be? A writer, perhaps?"

She smiled. "Enjoying better weather than you've been having, too. Would you like to keep the diary, and read it at your leisure?"

"If that is permitted."

"Please do. You can tell me what it's all about some time."

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Stefan learned that the American was a Professor in Social Sciences at a Mid-West University, and found that he could talk well and comprehensibly on his subject. Stefan did not like the social sciences, with their implication that men and women could be broken down into graphs and statistics by the means of a quantitative analysis, but Waring argued lucidly and reasonably, and he found that stimulating. He became aware, by degrees, that the wife, Helen, was getting restless; she interjected one or two observations which Stefan thought silly, and which Waring acknowledged and ignored. Stefan was glad when she turned her attention from them. But he found he had been deceived in that. When she had made sure of an audience among the others, she said, in quite a loud voice:

"You'll none of you ever believe what happened to Waring last night!"

Stefan saw the muscles in the other man's cheek tense as his jaw clenched. He continued with his argument, ignoring the remark. Elsewhere on the table there was a silence, which Bridget broke at last. She asked politely:

"What was that?"

Waring said: "For God's sake, Helen."

She grinned at him. "Waring thought he saw a fairy out in the moonlight."

His embarrassment made him speak quickly, almost stuttering.

"I guess it was a trick of the light. I was looking from my bedroom window, and I saw something moving. I caught just a glimpse after I'd put on my spectacles. It must have been an animal of some kind."

"He woke me," Helen said in a general address, "to tell me all about it."

Bridget said: "Actually, he's not the only person to have seen something."

Her fiance Daniel was grinning. "Don't tell me you have!"

"Mary, the maid, says she's seen the little people near the house."

Hanni said: "The little people. I do not understand that."

"It's an old legend in Ireland," Bridget said. "About this race of tiny men and women, who can do magic. Mostly they're invisible, but occasionally people can catch a glimpse of them. Some people."

"In Germany, also," Stefan said. Hanni still looked puzzled, and he turned to her, explaining. *"Die Kobolde. Verstehst du?"*

"Ah, yes." She nodded. "They do wicked things."

It was a simple nod, but he saw in the tilt of her dark head the pride and humility, the desperate suffering acceptance, of her race. It could still move him to anger and disgust. He said harshly:

"Not wicked. After all, they are not human."

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Bridget said: "The Irish fairies are reckoned to be a fairly mild lot, I believe. But Mat can tell us."

The Irishman said: "I'm not an expert on the national superstitions, by any means. But it's true that where the country people believed in them they didn't fear them in the way, for instance, the Scots feared the ones they had. Or the English, for that matter."

Waring seemed glad that it had developed into a general discussion. "Are they supposed to be found all over, or in some particular place?" he asked.

"I don't think many have been reported in Dublin," Mat said. "Which is to say that, like nearly all rural superstitions, it can't survive urbanization. The deeper into the country you get, the more tales you hear. Though now we have television, you're more likely to be told the plot of the latest 'Dangerman'."

Stefan asked: "Where do they live, the Irish fairies? In holes in the ground?"

"Some of them, maybe. But the raths were more popular as suggested residences."

"The raths?"

Mat smiled. "You are on one. Or right beside it. They were the old earth-forts. Later, in many cases, castles were built on them. As happened here. There's a ridge of land just beyond the tower that's characteristic."

Daniel said: "So it's reasonable to expect this spot to be haunted?"

"Not haunted. They're not like ghosts. But it's a place that in the old days the country people round about might have expected to be inhabited by them."

"And might still? Mary's a local girl, isn't she?"

"It's over three hundred years since the castle was destroyed, nearer six hundred since it was built. I doubt if any would be hanging about yet."

Bridget said: "They've probably put a curse on me, if they are. I took all their furniture out, and shipped it to a children's home."

It was Stefan's turn to be puzzled! Obliquities in English sometimes confused him, but he did not see how this one could make any sense at all. He echoed:

"Furniture?"

Bridget smiled. "It's a joke, Herr Morwitz. There were a lot of doll's houses in a room in the tower. The houses themselves are still there, but I sent off the dolls' beds, cupboards and so on."

Waring said: "Doll's houses, plural? Someone had several children here once?"

She shook her head. "It was just a hobby of my cousin's."

"Strange hobby."

"I suppose. Hobbies often are, aren't they?"

Daniel said: "Mr. Waring's fairy had probably been on an extended visit. He must have been terribly fed up when he got to the

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tower and found nothing but bare boards on which to lay his head. I'm sure you're right about the curse, Bridget. You'll get no sleep tonight for a certainty."

Waring said: "It looked . . ."

He hesitated, and broke off.

"Looked what?" Daniel asked.

"Tell us how he looked, darling," said Helen. "You were a bit confused last night."

She was smiling, challenging him. He accepted that with a glare, and turned to Daniel. He said:

"I guess I might as well look a complete fool. It was this impression I had, in the moonlight. It was an impression of something female rather than male."

Helen said: "Pretty? Was that why you took your time about calling me?"

Waring ignored that. Daniel said:

"So you did see something—well, strange?"

It was a serious inquiry, and it unsettled him. He said:

"I've told you—it must have been a trick of the moonlight. Some kind of animal, moving out there. There's no such thing as pure vision, is there? The mind always adds something and at night, when you're only half awake—what I mean is, it can add something strange. Isn't that what ghost stories are about?"

Mat asked: "What sort of animal, would you say?"

"I don't know. Does it matter?"

"I was wondering what kind of animal can give an impression of being female."

Helen laughed. "To Waring, any kind."

Stefan looked across at Hanni. She had fallen asleep with one hand up by her face, touching her cheek. He studied her in the light from his bedside lamp. As in that moment during supper, he was very conscious of her Jewishness. In reality, half Jewishness. If she had been fully Jewish, nothing could have saved her from the murderous attentions of his own, of her father's race. It was lucky for her that her mother had died before the war. He thought of the list she kept, in her father's Christian Bible, of the cousins and uncles and aunts, their full names written out as a mnemonic of frightfulness. The Bible was in the back of her bureau at home; he had come across it by accident one day, and had never spoken to her of it. All their names, and their relationship, the places where they had lived and the places where they died. Auschwitz and Belsen, Buchenwald and Theresienstadt.

Stefan put out the light. He lay in bed, aware of his body's rigidity, in the cool embrace of the sheets. He heard rain slashing heavily against the window, and his mind moved in strange paths,

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almost like the remote distorted paths of fever. He thought of what the American had thought he had seen. The small slim figure in the moonlight, in a silver world of innocence. To know that, even for a moment, even as a delusion, was something which he envied, without bitterness.

He grasped at sleep, oblivion, but could not reach it.

V

Mat could not remember a day more excruciating, more wildly fluctuating in its effects on him. There was the morning's waiting, testing the temperature of Bridget's anticipation and finding it gratifyingly cool—she went about the day's routine as cheerfully, as casually as ever, gave instructions to Mrs. Malone for Daniel's bed to be made up with as much indifference as for one of the guests. Mat hung about, listening for the sound of his car. When it came at last, he watched for her to go out to greet him, but she did not. Daniel brought his bag in, and Mat left his post at the upstairs window. He was on the point of charging down the stairs, fearful of missing the encounter, when he saw Bridget in the hall and realized it was going to happen now, any second. Daniel came in. She smiled at him, with nothing special in the smile, and opened her arms for him to kiss her. A light casual kiss, the sort you gave a brother, or an old friend of the family. Mat came downstairs, his heart thumping with relief, and she said:

"You remember Mat, of course, darling. He's been a tower of strength."

And the cold thin English face, probably not meaning to look contemptuous but conditioned into the look as they nearly all were, briefly smiling.

"I'm sure he has. You look very well, Mat. How's the fishing?"

For three hours after that, Mat had made plans. She must have been tired of him already in February—that was why she had been so willing to come out and start the hotel. He might not feel the same way—it was impossible to imagine any man wanting to relinquish a girl like Bridget—but the English had no depth of emotional feeling, the English men, that was, and in any case he would have to put up with it, as better men had done before him. He was wondering whether it was better to say something to Bridget quite soon, or to wait, when he saw them together again.

He was sitting in the library with the door open, and looked up when he heard Bridget's footsteps in the passage outside. He heard other footsteps following, and Daniel's voice saying something. Bridget gave a quick look into the room but did not see him—his

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chair was in the shadow and there was a vase full of flowers in the way. She had stopped, and now Daniel embraced her, and she was in his arms with all the passion that had been absent in the morning. He wondered if, not seeming to look, she had seen him then at the top of the stairs and been casual because of that. There was nothing casual in this kiss; her face worked against Daniel's and her hands gripped his neck, pulling his head down to hers. Mat did not want to see it, but could not look away. The two figures strained together. Then, as he watched in horror and fascination, Daniel's hand moved down from her back, rubbed along the curve of her thigh, tightened and gripped with assurance and proprietorial familiarity.

Mat still stared at the door after they had broken apart and gone. His legs and arms were quivering with tension. Part of his mind tried to tell him that at least he had been saved from making an absolute fool of himself, but the consolation was swamped by bitter wretchedness.

He kept out of their way until dinner. Afterwards, they all had coffee in the library. From behind the cup and saucer he watched her covertly. She was still the same—grey direct eyes under the glory of that golden brown mass of hair, red lips just parted in a smile. There was a discipline, a kind of honesty, even in the way she sat in the chair there. He tried desperately, for his peace of mind, to merge that figure with the one glimpsed in the passage, and could not. There was a mistake, an explanation; there had to be. He came to it suddenly, in a burst of illumination. It was the action of that hand which had so shockingly coloured it all with its gross implications of intimacy. But that had been Daniel's act, not hers. It was what you would expect of an Englishman. She had tolerated it, but she had not wanted or welcomed it—could not have. Maybe she was not ready yet to send him off, but she was a pure girl. One corner of her mouth lifted, the cheek dimpled, as she smiled at something Stefan said. There could be no doubt of it, no doubt at all.

His room was next to the one Daniel had been given; he heard the other man come up only a few minutes after he had done so, heard the door open and close, the creak of boards as he moved about the room, the running of a tap. Mat tried to think charitable thoughts about him, with moderate success. One had to be realistic; a lot of men were like that, in Ireland, too. He remembered with disgust some of the grubby ones you might see in the Bailey, writers they called themselves, and the talk overheard of this fornication and

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that adultery. He had an automatic impulse to pray to Mary for them all. At times like this, on the edge of sleep, old habits of thought came back, and he was not a man who looked at the universe with cold appraising intelligence, but a boy again.

The creak of a board snapped him back into consciousness and alertness. He heard another—in Daniel's room—and after that, he thought, the quiet opening of the door. Someone passing his own door, the sound almost lost in a new surge of wind and rain outside. He sat up, staring into the dark.

Had he been asleep? He was not sure. Looking at his watch, he saw that it was half an hour since he had come to bed. Daniel had left his room. Why? Well, probably to go to the lavatory; he would need to pass Mat's room to do that. Pay no attention, he thought—settle down and go to sleep. But he stayed, rigidly sitting up and staring into nothing. His heart was pounding again. Time passed. He looked at the luminous dial again. Ten minutes. More, a quarter of an hour. Loathing himself as he had done the time he had stolen chocolate from the village shop as a boy, but equally powerless to stop himself, he eased himself out of bed and felt for his slippers and dressing gown.

Outside, he hesitated. The dim lights were on at either end of the corridor. He was no longer sure what he had heard, or failed to hear. Daniel might have gone to the bathroom, and equally might have quietly come back: the wind had got up and was gusting heavily and noisily about the house. He went to the door of Daniel's room, and listened. No sound, but why should there be? There was no reason to think the man snored. He ought to go back to bed, but he would go along to the bathroom first himself.

It was unoccupied, dark, the door ajar. Which meant, probably, that that was what had happened—the man had gone there, and come back, and he had not heard him. But doubts and fancies were tearing at his heart again. Bridget's room was the last at the far end of the corridor. The one next door was at present unoccupied. There would be nothing wrong in going into it. He could sit for a minute, reassure himself with the silence and the thought of her lying on the other side of the wall, then go back to bed and sleep in peace.

He went quietly, opening and closing the door of the room with delicate care. A board creaked, but only a little, as he went towards the wall. He had to feel his way. It had seemed risky to put a light on, and the room was pitch black. But before his outstretched fingers touched the wall, he stopped. There was no doubt now.

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Distant voices murmured together in the darkness, a man's and a woman's.

They were not distinct enough for him to be able to make anything out of what they were saying. He found another rationalization; maybe they were just talking things over, about the hotel, their engagement, anything. They would not have had much chance to talk privately during the day. It could be that. He reached the wall and pressed himself against it. Louder, but still not clear. But he had to know—could not go back without knowing after all this. There was a trick someone had told him of once . . . a glass pressed against the wall, and your ear to it. There was a tooth glass, he remembered, above the washbasin. He groped his way to the corner, and found it. Then back to the wall, to the point where the sounds seemed loudest. Louder, but still indistinguishable, distorted. He shifted the glass, and again.

A kind of sigh, and her voice, all to clear, all too explicit. He stood for a petrified moment, and then stumbled away. Even in his incredulity and confusion and disgust, he was careful not to make a noise. The one possible thing worse would be for them to know of his being here.

The next morning, Mat felt tired, but he had no hangover. He had drunk about half the bottle of whiskey. He stared at himself in the glass, bleary but not much more so than usual at this time; nothing would show after a douse in cold water and a hard rub with a towel. He had the constitution for it, as his grandfather had had, and, according to him, his father before that. He poured himself a slug of whiskey, and drank it. That was better already. He could start thinking of what to do.

There was nothing to keep him here. He would be glad to be away, glad to be back in Dublin. But he had said, both to his father and to Bridget, that he would probably be staying a couple of days more, and he was not going to give anyone the impression that he might be running away. What in any case was there to run away from? She meant nothing to him now, and he had always known there were loose lascivious women in the world. He plunged his face into the refreshing coldness of the water, snorting into it the way he remembered his grandfather doing, when he was a boy.

He found no difficulty in facing Bridget. He told her there was a bottle of whiskey to go on his bill.

"What bill?" she said. "You should be charging me for all the work you've done."

"I invited myself here and I'll pay my bill." He had spoken more strongly than he intended.

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"We won't talk about it now," said Bridget. Did you say a bottle of whiskey? I thought you never touched liquor."

"It was medicinal," he said. "I feel I've got a cold coming on, and I find as often as not a drop of whiskey knocks it out before it can settle."

"Would you like some Contac? Or codeine?"

"No," he said. "The whiskey will be enough."

That day he motored to the village and bought a couple more bottles. He stored them in his room, underneath his socks. The rain, which had stopped for an hour or two, was beating in again from the bog. Looking from his window, he saw that there were more pools, and larger. If it went on long enough, he thought, the great lake would be here again, and the house and all of them deep beneath it. He had another drink, against the time.

He did not drink with the others, and he felt that he was holding his liquor well enough for them not to notice. They might have smelled his breath, but he sucked a few peppermints and in any case he was not one for allowing his face to get close to the faces of the people about him. In the evening, the subject of the little people was brought up again, and he listened to their chattering and said a few things as silly himself. There had been a good deal of drink taken by some of them, maybe because of the weather, and the talk was sometimes wild. The needling contest between the Americans started up again, and showed signs of becoming more serious. Bridget, intervening, said:

"Do you realize something? The rain's stopped. Listen."

Daniel went to the window, and drew the curtain a little to one side. He said:

"More than that, the moon's out." He drew the curtain right across. "Isn't that better?"

The night was clear: lawn and trees silver and black, further off the speckle of the lake, even the distant hills faintly visible. It was amazing how much detail could be seen—branches of the trees, a bush starkly outlined, the small island with the tumbledown shack on it. They were real and not-real at the same time, a dream still-photographed and preserved for the wakeful mind to gape at.

They looked in silence for a moment or two, before Helen said:

"On such a night as this . . . did Waring see his iddle-bitty fairy lady. What do you say we organize a posse to go look for her? A little people hunt."

Bridget said: "We'd frighten them away, I should think, stamping about out there."

"The answer, surely," Daniel said, "is to sit here and watch. I'll put the light out, so the fairies will

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think we've gone to bed." His voice was slurred, too, Mat noticed. "Does anybody object?" He went across and switched off the light. "Look at that, now. Better than television."

Mat watched him come back to stand behind Bridgets' chair. He rested his arms there, his hands not quite touching her hair. Her profile was visible against the light outside. It was funny how things changed in one's mind, he thought: she had been everything, and was nothing. They all chattered away, and he stared at the world of moonlight. He had been thinking he could do with another drink, and planning to slip upstairs, but for the moment the need had gone. He was melancholy and contented. It was a passing show, all of it, and a man of sense could amuse himself in watching. With just a little aid, a small tincture to warm the gelid blood.

Something moved.

It was over towards the walled garden, in the shadow. He did not say anything, but waited for it to happen again. It did, and this time he was not the only one who saw it.

Hanni said: "Look, out there."

There was a buzz of comment and question, a new concentration of looking. He could feel their tension, the half belief that here and now there might be wonders. It touched him, too. His fingers tightened on the arm of the chair.

The third time the movement was better defined: a comic and identifying hop. Bridget laughed, her voice as silver as the moonlight. Helen said:

"Good Christ, a rabbit!"

"A hare," Daniel said.

"Hare, shmare, what an anticlimax. That's what you saw the other night, honey, a crummy bunny."

"No," he said, "it wasn't that."

"O.K. It was a fairy with a furcoat. And tonight she's practising for a sack race."

Mat wanted the drink now, and he wanted to be away from them all. He stood up.

"I'm a bit tired. It's the cold I've got coming. Will you excuse me, if I go to bed."

Someone was in the room. He came out of sleep knowing this, his skin prickling with fear. He forced himself back and up against the headboard, pushing the sheets away so that he would be free to leap out. Making his voice hard, he said:

"Who's that?"

For answer, the light was switched on. She stood by the door, the door closed, in something fluffy and red with white trimmings. She looked strangely concentrated. As though she had been sleep walking? But could someone sleep walking switch on a light? He said:

"Cherry."

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"I'm sorry if I woke you." Her voice was low and level. "I couldn't sleep myself. I meant to go along to my parents' room, but I must have got the wrong door. I'm pretty bad at remembering directions and things."

He said: "They're right opposite. Number 4."

He pulled the sheets up again, but still felt embarrassed.

She said: "I get nervous when I can't sleep. In a strange place, especially. And with all that talk of banshees and leprechauns and little people . . . I guess I'm pretty stupid."

Mat shook his head. "It's a different world at night. Different altogether."

"Now that I have woken you . . ." She hesitated. "Could I stay and talk with you a while?" She smiled nervously. "Seems silly, waking two lots of people up. Am I being a terrible nuisance? Kick me out if you want to go right back to sleep."

"Stay, of course. I'm wide awake."

"You sure?"

"Quite sure."

She walked towards him. It was a silky translucent thing she was wearing, a kind of robe, with something silky and translucent underneath that again, of a deeper red. Her nightdress. It was terribly short because he could see the line where it ended and it was high up on her thighs. Through the two materials the white of her skin was glimpsed and lost again. He was conscious of alarm and fear, mixed with a sickening overpowering sweetness.

She sat down, not, as he had expected, in the chair, but on the edge of his bed. He felt the mattress give under her slight weight. He stared at her, and saw her smile in return. He had been thinking of her as a child, but she was not a child. Seventeen, and they grew up earlier in other countries. And she had come to him. It was the kind of fantasy he had had as a schoolboy, the occasion for sin and confession and disgust.

"What shall we talk about?"

She leaned forward slightly, and the V of her robe widened. The white trimmings, he saw, were on the neck of the night dress beneath it . . . and other white. Of her breasts beneath the diaphanous red.

"We could talk about you."

She shook her small dark head. "I'm dull."

"I don't think so."

The young purity of her face . . . but that was what he had seen in Bridget, and a fine fool it had made of him. They were all alike, and being young made no difference. It was a mask they put on, and it was their delight to exchange it for the grimacing mask of lust. As for himself . . . there was no confession any more, no belief in sin. Only disgust re-

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mained, and disgust was not always at war with desire: it could add spice to it.

He stretched out and took her hand. It was warm and small and soft and he felt the delicate ridges of her knuckles.

"I know," he said. "We'll have a little drink together first."

He put his other hand down beside the bed, and fished up the bottle. She shook her head very slightly.

"No. I don't drink at all. I don't like the taste of it." She looked at him, the concentration in her face making her seem almost to frown. "You have a drink, though, if you want one."

"No." He put the bottle back slowly. "It's a bit late for it, really, or a bit early." Her refusal shamed him, and he was confused again. He said harshly: "Why did you come here?"

"I told you. I was nervous. And lonely."

"Yes." He gazed at her in wonder. That trust and innocence, and he had mistaken it for brazenness. A movement showed the sweet curve of her breast again but this time provoked not desire but protectiveness. She was like a lovely daughter. "It can get lonely in the night."

The dark eyes stayed on his. "Could I lie down beside you on the bed? Would you mind that?"

He eased her down with his arm. She lay beside him. He said: "I'll give you a blanket. You'll be cold."

She lay silent while he tucked a blanket over and round her. She only spoke when he made as though to sit in the chair.

"No. Please lie with me."

He got into bed again. He had put his pillow under her head. She patted it with her hand, and he put his head down there. He said:

"Are you warm enough, Cherry?"

"Almost."

"Tell me about yourself," he said. "Tell me what you do at school."

"That's dull, too. Tell me what it's like being an attorney."

"Even duller."

They looked at each other from opposite ends of the pillow. She said:

"I like your eyes."

"I like yours. You're a very pretty girl."

"I'm glad—that you think so, that is."

They talked like old friends, without strain or awkwardness. In time her eyelids dropped, and she fell asleep. Mat waited until he was sure she was off, and then eased himself out of bed. It wouldn't do for them both to go to sleep, the world and people being as they were.

In the dawn, he woke her and packed her off to her room. She stood on tiptoe at the door, and he kissed her briefly on the lips. He

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felt tired, but happy and at ease.

VI

Daniel was wakened by Bridget's alarm going off; it was not a bell but an exceptionally irritating high-pitched buzz. She put her hand out and switched it off but did not immediately get up. He contemplated her hair, a silent riot on the pillow, and her shoulder exposed above it, the flawless whiteness of her skin. Happily brooding on this, he eased forward until her warm rounded body was touching all along the length of his own and, putting an arm about her under the sheets, seized one perfect breast. She continued to lie motionless, and he made a further, more intimate movement.

"No!"

She wrenched herself free, pushed back the sheets, and jumped out of bed. Her body, against the morning light, was a triumph, but he objected strongly to the way she was taking it towards her slippers and dressing gown.

"Brid," he said, "for God's sake!"

She slipped the dressing gown on, and turned to look at him while she tied the sash.

"No," she said, more quietly but equally firmly. "No, no, no, no, no. Do you realize it's twenty five to seven? And Mrs. Malone is quite capable of sleeping through her own alarm—she's done it a couple of times already. And Mat will probably be looking for his breakfast by half past seven, and the Morwitzes not long after. In fact, I *am* responsible for this place."

"Damn it to hell," he said, "and them with it. I've a good mind to get up and manhandle you."

"Just you see what happens if you try. And that's another thing. This is all very well, but it cannot go on. I reckon I've had about two and a half hours' sleep one way and another."

"The bed is too small," he agreed. "I woke once sneezing because your hair was tickling my nose. Haven't you got a double bed to move in here?"

"If I had, I wouldn't. I've risked my reputation harbouring you, as it is. There must be no more of these nocturnal excursions."

"You mean incursions." He sat up in bed. "Are you going to bolt your door against me? Then I shall have to set about noisily battering it down. Or sit outside and howl like a dog."

She said pleadingly: "Darling, do please see. I have a fairly rigorous day of it. I'll be run ragged unless I get some sleep at night."

"The solution's simple. Give them their money back, and pack them off. They can probably get in somewhere at Ballina. Now come back to bed."

The pleading expression changed to a mulish one.

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"If anyone is going to be packed off it will be you, my fine feathery friend. Once and for all, I am going through with this for the season. Later, we'll see."

She was moving towards the door. He called after her:

"What do you mean—we'll see? See what?"

She turned, with her hand on the door knob. "Just see. Now you get up. You can sleep all day if you want to, but not in my bed. I'll send Mary up to your room with tea in half an hour, and you'd better be there."

"You bring it."

"I shall be too busy. Remember to open the door a crack to see if anyone's about before you come out." She blew him a kiss. "Bye."

Daniel slumped back into bed as the door closed, but almost at once sat up again. As tired as he was, there was a very good chance of going back to sleep if he stayed horizontal, and this present Bridget was tricky enough without asking for trouble. Cursing to himself he collected his things, made the necessary check at the door, and padded along the corridor to his own room. Once there, he stared at his scarcely disturbed bed, a striking contrast to the one he had just left. He supposed he could get into it, but a short nap would leave him feeling much worse, and lying in would mean a superior smile from Bridget when he did come down. Wearily, he rumpled the bed with his hand, sat on the edge of it, and lit a cigarette.

We'll see, he thought. Had she meant anything by it, or was it just a threat to keep him in line. Even that was disturbing enough, underlining the difference between this Bridget and the one who used to trot into Joe Grayson's office every morning clasping her shorthand pad and pencil. Could it have been serious, though? Could she possibly be contemplating carrying on with the place after September? No, he told himself, that was absurd.

He found himself with time to kill before breakfast. He would not, he knew, be kindly received in the kitchen. He looked out of his window. It had rained again in the night, but now the sky was clear and blue except for a few thin high bars of cloud in the south. Half an hour in the fresh air would do him no harm. He could go down to the garden or the lake. Or—the idea struck him—do as he had been meaning to do since Mat spoke about earth forts and go and have a look at that characteristic ridge on the far side of the tower. There were two routes he could follow to get there, that by way of the front of the house being shorter. He decided he would take the other, which would mean walking most of the way round the lake.

He studied the lake as he skirted

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it. It was not a very prepossessing stretch of water. It seemed to him to have a stale stagnant smell, but that might be coming in from the bog on his other side. An unlovley bit of country altogether. He could see the argument for the place as a stronghold, providing the bog were as impenetrable as it was said to be, but that anyone should choose to build a dwelling house here was a mystery that was probably rationally insoluble. And the same went for Cousin Seamus buying it. He reminded himself that this was Ireland, where the rational was not held in the same high esteem as on the other side of St. George's Channel, but was not entirely satisfied by that.

The ridge was parallel with the base of the tower and some ten feet away from it. It ran for sixty or seventy feet, at the near end broken abruptly by the margin of the lake and at the other crumbling away to the ordinary level of the ground. In places rock showed, which could be either the projecting faces of large boulders incorporated in it as a strengthening factor, or outcrops of a basic structure on which, perhaps, the tower had been built. The whole was covered with stubbly grass with a few flowers like thrift and saxifrage, and a few small tenacious bushes.

The height of the ridge varied between four and six feet, and the elevation was steep but fairly easily climbable. Childishly, Daniel took a run and scaled it, using his hands to help him up. It was amazing, he reflected, what latent strength the old king of the castle complex had.

Daniel stood by the foot of the tower and looked around. As far as he could see in any direction, there was no sign of habitation, no artifact except this massive crumbling pile whose stones might have been untouched for centuries. There were those who would find such a prospect entrancing, but he was not among them. He enjoyed Nature in its place, and the place was that of strict subjection to humanity. Nor was he under any illusion about the history evoked by these slabs of stone—a wretched, diseased, uncomfortable life, lit by the passing flames of drunkenness and orgy. There was nothing in it that spoke to him. He kicked a loose stone. With lives so drab, it was not surprising that they dreamed up beliefs in fairies and leprechauns and the rest.

It was time to go back for breakfast; he could carry on round the tower and so get to the front of the house. The turf was springy underfoot, a bright cropped green except for one small patch where the brown earth showed through. He glanced at it idly, and had walked past before the smaller detail registered on his mind and brought him back. It was not loose soil but clay, capable of taking an impression, and the impression, though

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blurred, was unmistakeable. The print of a foot, in a sandal.

Daniel knelt down to look at it more closely. A footprint, yes. But no more than two inches in length.

They all went out with him after breakfast, except Cherry who was sleeping late. Daniel took opportunities to study their faces as they trooped round the house in the direction of the tower. If one of them had planned it, he or she was playing it well. Their expressions were those of people puzzled, mildly interested, rather more incredulous.

"Here it is," he said. "Up here."

The approach to the ridge this side formed an easy gradient. Bridget dropped back, and Daniel led the way. He had a momentary apprehension as he did so that there would be nothing there—that he had not seen the footprint at all or that it had been removed. The thought of the idiot he would look if that were so sent a hot flush down his neck. But it was there, of course, as it had to be. Fairy footprints might fade with the dew, but this was real, a physical impression in the earth.

They crowded round, examining it. Helen said:

"It's cute, isn't it? How'd it get there?"

Daniel said: "That's what I would like to know. The only thing that makes any sense is that some one of us came out early and made it. Or did it yesterday afternoon, perhaps, though that's less likely. It was raining pretty heavily then."

Bridget stared at it, wide-eyed. "It can't be real, can it? I mean . . ."

Waring said: "Made by a real foot, you mean? If so, and the proportions are anything like normal, the foot must have been attached to someone around a foot high, give or take the odd inch."

Stefan said: "It is a joke, you think? Because of our talk about the little people, someone came out here and made this mark." He shook his head. "I do not understand that."

Hanni asked him a question in German, and he rattled off an answer in the same language. Helen said:

"I don't think it's a joke at all. We're all too goddam disbelieving because we've seen everything explained on television."

Her voice had a dogmatic braying note to it which made one disinclined to take what she said seriously. Waring's voice, in reply, had an edge.

"Let's try and remain rational. Even a pygmy would leave a mark twice or three times the size of that one. Physiologically, it's lunacy."

"Is it?" Helen said. "Are you so sure? The horse bred up from Eohippus. Maybe there was a race of really tiny men at one time. Maybe a few could survive in a

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wild and deserted part of the world like this. What about the coelocanth? Ten years ago they believed it had been extinct for a couple of million years."

"It's not the same," Waring said. "Nothing like. We've got fossil imprints of Eohippus, and the coelocanth. There's nothing in the record that points to tiny primitive men."

She said triumphantly: "So the record may not be complete. Look at all the stuff Leakey dredged up in Africa only a few years back. That was all new—there'd been nothing like it before."

She looked pleased with herself in a different way from usual. It occurred to Daniel that it was because she had got Waring into an intellectual rather than a personal argument—that she could not feel herself recognized as a woman without first being recognized as someone capable of matching his thought. While for Waring, probably, the specification was reversed: the emotional discord vitiated harmony on every level.

Waring said: "Sure. It could be that we just haven't found the right fossils yet. Little people with wings. After we've got them, we can go and look for fossils of men with heads growing out of their armpits, and women with a fish skeleton from the waist down. They're just as well documented as fairies."

"Who said anything about wings? You can reduce any argument to nonsense. But you can't get over that footprint. You remember what T. H. Huxley said? A scientist should sit down before truth like a little child."

"That wasn't what he said when they tried to get him interested in spirit mediums. Another quality you've got to have is knowing where to draw the line."

Their points of reference were just about meaningless to Daniel, but plainly understood by each of them. T. H. Huxley? Some relation of the novelist? It came from a common ground shared some time in the past, in the days when they could talk to each other. The look in Helen's face showed that she might be recognizing that, and remembering. As though slamming the door on a cupboard that had unexpectedly fallen open, Waring went on quickly:

"The point is, I'm not going to assume that this is anything but a fake before I have to. Why should I? It almost certainly is a fake, as Daniel says. Someone amusing himself by trying out our gullibility. Well, whoever he is, my reaction is that I'm not interested."

In a quiet voice, Helen said: "Why here?"

Waring had turned to go, but now turned back.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"O.K., assume that someone in the party thought it might be fun

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to fudge up a footprint because of all that talk—about you seeing one of them in the moonlight and the rest. There are plenty of places nearer the house where you could make a mark like that. As far as I know, Daniel's the first person to come around here, and that was by accident. There couldn't be any reason to think anyone would find it, and the first heavy rain shower would destroy it. So what's the point?"

Waring stared at her, his mouth twisted in concentration. What she said, Daniel saw, was incontrovertible: the odds must have been fantastically against himself or anyone else making the discovery. He felt a shiver of unease, contemplating that. There was a sensible explanation, there must be, but . . .

Mat said: "As to that, there's one very easy way to account for it." Daniel looked up and found himself being watched with cold anger. "That's if he had faked it himself. Personally, I don't think it's the sort of thing an American or a German or an Irishman would find funny. The English always pride themselves on having a very special sense of humour. He could have made the mark, and then fetched us out to look at it."

Daniel said: "I suppose I could. Except that I don't regard it as funny, either."

Bridget said: "And doesn't the same argument apply, really? I mean, it would be much more effective if someone else found it, surely. The obvious place to leave the mark would be out in the garden, where there was a reasonable chance of it being noticed."

Mat said: "And him noticed while making it, maybe."

The hostility extended towards Bridget, as well. The disgruntled obverse of infatuation; there was nothing one could do about that. They were at something of an impasse, altogether. He was trying to think of something to say, when Stefan called to them. He had left the group and was standing about fifteen feet away. He squatted down on his haunches.

"Have you seen this?"

There was a hole near the base of the tower wall where, at some time in the past, one of the big stones had fallen out. It led downwards and inwards, a twisting funnel of blackness.

Mat said heavily: "And is that where the little man is supposed to have come out from? Well, there's confirmation for you, and Daniel didn't find that. Though maybe he'd have drawn our attention to it if we'd looked like missing it."

Daniel said: "Confirmation of what? You expect to find holes in old walls."

Stefan said: "But this one has been used. The stone is shiny—there, see—where it has been rubbed. And there are scuff marks outside."

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"There's a straightforward explanation for that," Daniel said. "Rats. It's a rat-hole."

"Well, now," Mat said, "do you want us to argue you into it? Maybe we aren't taking the joke in the right spirit?"

"You can take it in any spirit you like," Daniel said. "Whiskey will do."

He regretted the stupid pun as soon as it was out, but was not displeased to see the Irishman flush in response. Waring had got down beside Stefan, and was examining the hole closely. He said:

"It doesn't look like a rat run to me. I don't see any droppings. No grease marks, either, and no trace of hairs. And the earth isn't loose enough."

Bending down and peering still more closely, Waring picked delicately with finger and thumb. Then he held his hand up to the light.

Helen asked: "What is it?"

"Cotton thread. It was snagged on a sharp edge."

It was green in colour, not more than half an inch long.

Daniel said: "Does that mean anything? Bits of thread blow about and catch on things."

Helen said loudly: "That was snagged, not just caught. It couldn't just have blown there."

Waring stood up, stretching his back. He flicked the thread away. He said:

"It could have blown there. More likely than one of the little men tearing his shirt on his way out. Or someone might have stuck an arm down there, seeing how far he could reach, and left it that way."

"And the footprint?" Helen demanded.

"A lousy joke. I don't care who made it."

Stefan said to Bridget: "At the bottom of the tower—there are rooms?"

"A warren of them. Cells rather than rooms."

"Is anything kept there?"

"There are various piles of junk that I haven't got round to sorting out. I've only been down with a torch. There's no light down there, and the air's stale."

Mat said: "They would have been the dungeons, store cellars and so on. There used to be a ditch around the base of the tower, but it's earthed up long since, and blocked up the air and light vents."

"Could one look at the rooms?" Stefan asked. "Is it permitted?"

"Of course," Bridget said, "if you would like to." She gave a slightly nervous laugh and glanced round the assembled faces. "How serious are we being about all this?"

Helen said: "I'm serious. I'd like to have a look down there as well. Didn't you say the other night that the girl Mary said she'd seen things?"

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"Yes. But she's not very bright, and she's full of superstition. She's nothing to go by."

"And there has been nothing else strange that has happened?" Stefan asked.

"No. That is . . ."

"Yes?"

She said reluctantly: "Things missing."

"What things?"

"Food, chiefly. Oh, just odd things. A bar of chocolate, fruit, a packet of raisins. The sort of thing a child might steal."

Daniel said: "Mary, you mean?"

"Well, I thought so. And it seemed best not to bother. I would have given them to her if she'd asked me. Even if she's not bright, she works hard. She earns more than I pay her."

Mat said: "And the candles. And the string, and that penknife."

"They were probably just mislaid—the pen knife, certainly." She turned to Daniel, explaining. "It belongs to Mrs. Malone—one of those very tiny pen knives. Not much more than an inch long. She was always putting it down somewhere and thinking she'd lost it. Eventually she did lose it. It will turn up eventually. She's a great mislayer of articles. That's another reason I wasn't surprised to find things missing."

Stefan said: "Food. And string and candles. And a very small knife. They are all useful objects."

He spoke with an earnest excitement. His Teutonic soul, Daniel thought, had scented a wonder and was nose down and baying on the track. His own feeling was that they were being led into absurdity, as much as anything else by their isolation from the world. No daily newspapers, no television, a barren landscape stretching away to the distant hills. It sounded marvellous, a wonderful corrective to the stresses and irritants of modern life. But people needed things to believe, and, losing one complexity, might well set about inventing another, even to the extent of dreaming up a race of Lilliputians inhabiting the dungeons at the bottom of an old tower. Stefan, clearly, was on the way to having it all worked out, with the potential uses of all the missing articles neatly docketed. And there was, in fact, no justification at all; as Bridget had said, it was not surprising that things should be missing with Mrs. Malone and Mary in charge of them. A framework of speculation, based on nothing.

Except, he was forced to remind himself, the footprint. Which, if it had been made as part of some peculiar hoax, could only reasonably have been planted by himself. But he had seen it for the first time and by accident not much more than an hour ago. There had to be an explanation of that, but he

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could not begin to get a glimmering of one.

Helen said to her husband: "Maybe I ought to apologize to you, darling." She was excited, too. But more than that she was trying hard, groping perhaps for that common ground, long covered by the flood waters of marriage. "What you saw in the moonlight—what did it look like? Tell us some more about it."

Waring said in a hard voice: "I saw nothing. There was nothing to see. Talking about it inspired someone to pull this thing with the footprint. O.K., then—enjoy yourselves."

He turned away and walked rapidly back towards the house.

VII

Stefan had read the journal late at night, with the rain beating hard outside and Hanni peacefully sleeping in the next bed. It was a strange, exhilirating experience, this contact with the mind of a man unknown, in all probability dead years ago, but who yet seemed so much more real to him than most of the people he met in daily life. A German, like himself, as deeply aware of guilt, as deeply engaged by its complexities, a sensitive and cultured man who had come, as he had come, to this place on the western edge of the continent, land-locked but almost within smell of the great ocean; and who felt, as he did, that there was a meaning to be plucked from the maelstrom of existence—tragic, maybe, but giving significance, purpose—that he might yet find it, but whether he did or not the seeking was the justification. Why had he come here? There was no clue in the journal, nor to the work he spoke of. There was much of recollection, and of remembered unhappiness. V., it was clear, had been his wife, deeply loved; her death, after many years, still resented, still, at times, impossible to accept. He wrote of her with tenderness and without affectation. This had been a love, Stefan thought, hearing Hanni's gentle breathing, uncrippled by circumstance, a deep engagement of two minds with no barrier between them.

Bridget had said he could tell her what was in the journal when he had read it. It had been no more than a gesture of politeness, but he had intended to do that. He thought now that he would not. There was nothing important to tell, nothing that would interest her; and its intrinsic character, and what he felt about it, could not be conveyed in English. Stefan turned back to one page that had particularly struck him, and read it again:

"The strong man creates his own philosophy and moral code; to take them ready made from another is the action of a weakling.

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But what meaning do these terms have? For the first makes up his outlook from a great number of small things—events, defeats, triumphs, prejudices—while the second recognizes an excellence in one person with which he would choose to identify himself completely. As I did, with V. There were human imperfections in her, as there must be in all, but I embraced them because of the essential rightness, the splendour of her. I could have lived my life in her shadow, worshipping her gods, acting in accordance with her wishes, expressed or unexpressed. I would not have questioned my life, because to do so would have been to question her, and I could not doubt her goodness.

"But she abandoned me. Not of her own volition, but the one left is abandoned even though it is death that intervenes, not faithlessness. And her creed had no power to compel me once she was gone. The fullness went from life, leaving not the emptiness there had been before but a much greater one, a night without moon or stars. What she had believed and wished and sought had no meaning without her. There was no point to anything.

"Except work, of course. Work was my salvation at a time when I could have wished to invent a god so that I might revile him. Work made the fatuous minutes and hours and days pass more quickly. Work drained the blackness from the night, leaving no colour perhaps but, at least, shapes in sombre grey.

"I am glad that I have never been tempted to believe that the dead survive. I would not be judged by her ghost."

Stefan stared at the page lying open on the sheet. What, though, if it is the ghost that comes to judgment? "I could have lived my life in her shadow." As I, he thought, in his. "There were human imperfections . . . but I embraced them because of the essential rightness, the splendour." You were in a happier case than I, my friend, because you could still say that and believe it to be true. How much easier to fear the other's judgment than one's own. You at least could think and write of what had once been.

Hanni murmured softly in her sleep—a lament? an accusation? —and turned away from him. He put away the book and switched off the light. The wind howled in the darkness, but outside, far away. He was tired, his body exhausted by exercise, his mind soothed by the peace of this soft, rain-bleared land. His leg kicked and he was falling, into sleep, into a dream.

He saw the mountains, the twin peaks dark with pines and between and beyond the great white summit, blinding against the blue, of the one they called Old Lonely. Every summer, as long as he could

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remember, that had been the first thing he had seen from his bedroom window in the morning, sometimes shrouded in mist but always inescapably there. Except that this was not as one saw it from the gable window. He was at a lower level, he realized, looking out from the verandah. And on that instant it was no dream, but reverie. He was awake and remembering.

In uniform still; there had been no time to change. He had gone up to his mother's bedroom, and stayed with her until she fell into a restless sleep. Then he had come down, and his father had poured him a beer, and they had talked in quiet voices so as not to waken her.

"What does the doctor say?"

His father shrugged. "That we must wait and see."

"How long after the news about Karl?"

"Five days. She did not sleep, and would not eat."

She loved her sons. It had been bad enough when Johann was killed in France—it had taken her a year to recover from the shock—but this was Karl, and Karl—they had all known—was her favourite. Stefan had never resented that. He loved her, but he was his father's son. And the only one left now.

The beer cooled his throat. In Italy one drank wine, and there was the livid heat, the white choking dust, flies and stench and fear. One dreamed of the cool fresh air of the mountains, of bright flowers starring the scented grass, of this place, a time like this. He saw his father watching him, blue eyes impassive.

"There is one thing we can do—you and I together."

"What?"

"I could have got him back from the front, but he would not permit it. You are the only one she has left."

Stefan was silent. The thought had occurred to him already, selfishly in the first place. There were rumours that the Division's next move would be to the East. He did not enjoy the Italian war, but everyone knew what the Russian front was like.

His father said: "We have lost two sons. And you have done your part in the war. It is no disgrace if you take something safer now. And it may mean everything to her."

"I will think about it." He paused. "What is the news from Berlin? Are we losing the war?"

"No. We cannot afford to."

"That is always said."

"But this time it is true. If it were only the Americans and the English . . ."

He had not intended to speak of it until later, but it had been nagging at his mind more than he knew. He said:

"Father. Listen."

"Yes."

"There are stories one hears."

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"About what?"

"One of our officers met an old friend of his on leave. He comes from a place called Bergen-Belsen. There is a work camp there, and he says they are using it to murder Jews. By the thousand. Day after day, trains packed with Jews, and day after day the sky blackened with smoke from the crematoria where they burn their bodies. Men, women, children even. Thousands every day."

It was enough to have said it. Even though his father did not reply right away, Stefan was reassured, reading the disgust and anger in his face.

"The English are good liars," he said. "In the first war, also. Our soldiers were cutting the hands off virgins, sticking babies with their bayonets, and our factories were making soap out of corpses. This was for their own morale, and for the neutrals, but here in Germany I heard about the soap that was being made from the dead. And in this war . . . We have a continent to hold down—they spread their lies through France, the Low Countries, Italy, Scandinavia, and the whispers travel here, into the homeland. Some knaves spread them, and some fools believe them." The blue eyes stared at Stefan. "You are neither."

"The one who told me did not seem a knave or a fool."

"There are camps, as you know, and Jews are sent to them. They are admitted enemies of the Reich, and the war is too desperate to allow liberty to our enemies. They work, as we all work. When the war is over, they can go back to their stinking ghettos, if that is what they choose, though the camps are healthier. The camp at Bergen-Belsen has a smelting plant, and smelting plants have furnaces, and furnaces fill the sky with smoke. That information, of course, is secret."

Stefan nodded. His father took the empty stein from him, and filled it again with beer. When he had put it down in front of him, he grasped Stefan's shoulder with his right hand. He said:

"If these murders were happening, I would know of them. That is obvious, isn't it?"

It was obvious. Even before the war, Stefan could remember seeing him talk to Himmler on terms of near equality. There had been promotions since then. He said, in apology:

"One loses touch. And there is so much confusion."

His father nodded. "I know. Come back home. You have done enough service at the front."

Stefan shook his head. "No. I will stay there. I know that job best."

"Think about it."

"I do not need to."

That had been his last leave during the war, the last time he saw his mother, who died two

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months later, the last time but one he saw his father. Stefan curled his body into a ball in the bed. Even remembering that had been too much: he closed his mind against memories still more bitter.

When Daniel talked at the breakfast table of what he had seen outside, Stefan was puzzled and mistrustful. The reasonableness of the English was only a thin veneer over their incalculability, and their self confidence was unnerving. Some elaborate joke, he thought, and was inclined to keep his distance. But his curiosity was stronger than his caution. He decided he would remain watchful, uncommitted. He maintained this attitude while they were arguing about the impression in the ground, content to observe the various hostilities between them, and to wait for the explanation of the print itself to emerge.

All this changed when, wandering away from them and their bickering, he saw the hole in the wall. There was no real reason for it to have such an effect; it was an ordinary hole where one of the big stones had fallen out, what one would expect in an old building half ruined and uncared for. But glimpsing it he became, for the first time, truly conscious of the footprint, and its possible significance. It was no longer isolated, a mystery out of context. The creature that might have made it ceased to be hypothetical, and was conceivable. It was fantasy still, but a fantasy which, if one sought to exclude it, left a far less credible void.

The suggestion that it had been used by rats was not to be taken seriously. The bit of thread, on the other hand, was an almost expected confirmation. So, after he had asked about the inside of the tower, came Bridget's reply to his query as to whether anything strange had been noticed. The things missing were precisely what should be missing. Food. String. Candles. And a knife. The apparatus for survival in a giant's world.

They went by way of the door at the end of the passage. The stairs wound up to the room with the dolls' houses, which Bridget had showed them on the day of their arrival, and down to a part which only Mat had seen, during the time he had been helping her to get the place ready for guests. It was quite black—the beam from the big torch picked out isolated circles of light on the worn grey stone, in one place showing a surface glistening with water that had leaked through from somewhere, in another a pair of initials —R.N.—incised a centimetre deep. Stefan used his torch to illuminate the steps, which were broken and uneven, the more so as they got deeper. The air was cool and mustily damp, smelling of mud.

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The stairs ended. The floor was paved with huge flat slabs, but there were places where smooth rock jutted up; the tower, clearly, had been built on the foundation of a natural outcrop. They were in a fairly small room, whose fourth wall followed the interior curve of the building. Open doorways led off from two of the remaining walls. They were quite small, the lintels less than five feet off the ground. Daniel led the way through one, warning them to duck their heads, and they followed him.

This chamber was a repository for the junk Bridget had spoken of. It was somewhat larger than the first, but more than half was taken up by old furniture, boxes, paintings, and miscellanea. While they were looking at one of the paintings Stefan went ahead into the next room. There was more rubbish here, and in one corner a pile of stone where a wall had collapsed. Mat had followed him.

Stefan said: "How many rooms are there, altogether?"

"I don't know," Mat said. "The place is a warren of them. And some you can't reach."

"Why not?"

"I'll show you. Through here, and then through the opening on the right."

Steps went down from that doorway. His torch picked out two and then found something else, the blackness of water. There was a noise of dripping further in. Stefan bent down and tried to see further. The whole floor of the chamber was submerged.

"How deep?" he asked.

Mat said: "I've no idea. Nor whether there are any other rooms on the far side. This must be the level of the lake, and the water's seeped in under the foundations."

Daniel's voice came from behind them. "Are you all right in there?"

Mat called back: "Sure." He said to Stefan: "Let's go on."

They went through the other doorway. The whole place was a maze of small chambers, mostly empty but some with heaps of rubbish. Stefan's sense of direction had abandoned him, and he recognized a room as one previously traversed; but there was nothing disturbing in this. It would be easy enough to find their way out, and they could hear the progress of the other two. Another room, and Mat said:

"Shine the torch over here."

His voice had a sharpness in it. Stefan swung the torch round. It lit up a ledge that projected from one wall a few inches above the ground. A stub of candle stood on it.

Stefan felt a wave of excitement at the sight of this small ordinary object. He said:

"Candles were missing. Did she not say that?"

Daniel and Helen came through

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while they were examining it. Helen said:

"You think that might be . . ." She laughed nervously. "A street lamp for Lilliputians?"

Daniel said: "It's probably been there for years. It wouldn't be worth taking up—there's less than an inch of candle left. Let's try and keep rational about this."

Mat said: "It wasn't here a week ago."

There was a pause. Daniel said: "You can't be sure of that. One room looks very much like another."

"I'm sure, all right," Mat said. "But if we want to be certain, I can tell you there's a cross carved above the door over there, and what looks like part of a letter S."

Both torches found it. The cuts went deep. The cross must have taken many weary hours. He had started on something else—his initials, or perhaps a prayer—and then unexpectedly he had been taken out, for release or execution, or just to be moved to another cell. There were bolts set in the wall, Stefan saw.

Daniel said: "In that case, someone must have brought it down here in that time. Bridget, maybe."

"Why should she bring a candle, instead of the torch?" Mat said. "Anyway, she's not been down. She's been too busy."

"I could make the same charge you did up above," Daniel said. "You spotted the candle, you're the one who's so sure it wasn't here a week ago. In which case . . ."

"My God!" Helen said. "Do you have to throw these silly accusations about? Can't you see that we're standing on the edge of maybe the most fantastic, most wonderful discovery?" She put her hand out into the beam of the torch, holding something—the wrapping off a chocolate bar. "We found this back a way. The candy was missing, as well."

Daniel said: "It could have been the girl—Mary. She might steal the chocolate and come down here to eat it. Girls of that age do odd things."

"She's as full of fears as a broken-spirited horse," Mat said. "Nothing on earth would get her down here, and you know it."

Daniel said stubbornly: "There's nothing conclusive. A wrapper, a stub of candle. It's very little to go on."

"And a footprint," Stefan said. "Do not forget the footprint."

They were silent. In a flat voice, Daniel said:

"I think we ought to be getting back. We told Bridget half an hour."

Following behind the rest, Stefan noticed that one of the boxes on top of the old mantle was a file with German lettering. He opened it. There was a mass of papers, and a leather-bound notebook like the one Bridget had given him, with

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the same spiky handwriting inside. Daniel and Helen were already on the stairs, but Mat had hung back, waiting for him. He closed the book, and slipped it in his pocket.

VIII

Waring walked out to the walled garden when the expedition set out for the tower. Once inside, one was in a different country. It was possible to see the upper part of the house, and from the elevation of the stepped dais at the centre, which held the sun dial, one saw the hills, but otherwise there were only the shrubs and hedges and flower gardens, the walks and arbours, and every vista blocked by the enclosing red brick of the walls.

He was disturbed by what he had heard a little earlier. He had been looking for Bridget, to tell her about a light bulb that had failed in their room, and had heard her voice through the open kitchen door. He had held back, partly to let her finish, partly because she was in the kitchen, not the guests' quarters, and had heard his name mentioned.

Bridget said: "What about Waring?"

Daniel answered her: "No, he's not going."

"But she is?"

"Didn't you hear her? She thinks the whole thing is just terribly terribly cute." He made, Waring noted with distaste, a very bad shot at reproducing Helen's accent. "I suppose that's why he's so determined to have nothing to do with it."

Bridget said: "It's a pity they spend so much time getting at each other."

"Yes. She, I thought, was not so bad in that respect this morning. Trying quite hard to be civilized."

"It's rough on Cherry," Bridget said.

Waring had moved away before they could come out. His first reaction had been one of simple annoyance. Not at their being discussed—one had to expect that—but at the failure to see who was the aggressor in the continuing irregular warfare. They had both been branded equally; Helen, in fact, as far as the morning was concerned, judged the innocent party. "Trying quite hard to be civilized." Oh brother, he thought, I could have gone in there and told you something about being civilized! The time she set fire to my suits, and nearly burned the house down. Or the time she punched me in the gut when we were doing sixty five on a crowded freeway. Not to mention all the non-physical aggressions, the insults and sneers at cocktail sessions and dinner parties, the time she met that couple from New Haven, who bored her by talking horses, and she said: "Speaking of geldings, I don't think you've met my husband."

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In the garden, he gradually cooled down. After ten minutes or so he was ready to be objective, to admit that the English couple had no axe to grind, that their observations were honest in intention at least. If he was thought to be as bad as Helen, that must be the impression he had given. And yet he had chosen this vacation to make things easier, had been desperately concerned, that first day, in case Helen should insist on moving on. He ought to be delighted that she was quite liking the place, that she had now picked up this wild goose chase fantasy about little people to keep her engrossed.

This thought recalled to him the dinner table that second day, and swamped him in a new surge of rage. It had been bad enough that there had been the humiliation in the bed. Then, unguarded and confused by finding he had woken her, he had been so unutterably stupid as to tell her what he had thought he had seen. She had told him not to be a bloody fool, and to come to bed. He had woken with the apprehension that she would bring it up again, but she had not. Nothing had been said all day, and he had thought she had forgotten the whole thing. And then at dinner . . . that blaring voice: "You'll never believe what Waring thought he saw last night!"

Anger subsided into sick disgust. There was a bed of roses, but they were in poor shape, the bushes weak and spindly, leaves cankered, flowers small and few in number. Whiffs of a feeble scent came up from them. The soil was probably wrong, he thought, and they had been neglected for years. A bit of tidying up made no difference when things had been let to drift for a long time.

He thought: is that what life offers me—to tag along after the whims of someone I despise? To accept the kicks, grin at the humiliations, and smile nicely when she decides she's put me through the hoop enough for the time being, and marital harmony is now on the agenda? The most monstrous thing of all was that this morning he had known she was trying. That had been nothing to do with the fighting and the acting. In the middle of that crazy argument about the footprint and fossils—Eohippus and the coelocanth and Leakey—there had been a glimpse of her as lonely and wistful. As human. And he had responded with sarcasm and bitterness.

But what other response was possible? It was not just the memory of what the past had been like, but the absolute certainty that the future would be no different. It was like analysing the results of group surveys. To start with, while you were learning, there was a degree of unpredictability. The more surveys you had to work on, the

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more the unpredictability ironed out. In the end you had a line on a graph and you knew that any points falling outside it were minor aberrations which could not affect the overall picture. It worked that way with people. The mystery unravelled and eventually you saw clearly. You might love what you saw, or hate it, or be indifferent to it. What you knew was that you weren't going to change it, and neither was anybody else.

The last line of the conversation came back to him. "It's rough on Cherry." He realized he had not wanted to remember that, nor to consider its implications. It did not really matter if he was blamed for the war, or whether or not they were right in blaming him. The only ones that really mattered in a war were the noncombatants. The noncombatant. With that in mind, there was no case for self-righteousness or self-justification.

Cherry did not come down until after eleven. Waring asked her if she had slept badly, but she shook her head.

"I stayed awake last night, reading a book, and I picked it up again when I realized I'd slept through breakfast."

Helen, finding them talking, said excitedly:

"You want to know what we found in the tower?"

She was talking to Cherry, but Waring realized he was expected to stay in the conversation, if only as a sleeping partner. Cherry made a suitable response, explaining that she had not heard anything, and Helen told her—about the footprint Daniel had found, the hole, and the trip the four of them had made down inside the tower. Cherry said politely:

"Sounds like it might have been fun. Did Mat go with you?"

"And Daniel and Stefan."

"You should have called me."

She spoke with a mild interest which might or might not be real. Sometimes, watching her and her calmness, almost serenity, Waring asked himself what he was worrying about. It had not touched her: she was strong enough in herself not to be affected by the wild animals her mother and father turned into from time to time. He had a spell of thinking this now, and it ended the way it always did: he was back in that hot August morning, picking up the telephone and hearing the awkward, aggrieved, whining voice on the line. "This is Leroy Biggin of Camp Ashmole. I'm afraid I have to tell you something rather unpleasant, Mr. Selkirk." He jerked his mind away from that, and gave his attention to what Helen was saying.

". . .something down there. Just one thing you can explain away, but when you take all of them together you have to admit there's something that needs investigating."

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She looked challengingly at Waring. He said:

"I guess you're right. Were you thinking of going down again after lunch?" He smiled at Cherry. "What do you say—we might join in?"

Helen said impatiently: "There's no point in that. We've seen all there is to see. If there's anything there, they would hear us coming down the stairs. There are all sorts of holes something could bolt into. The walls are six feet thick in places and probably honeycombed with little tunnels."

"What do you plan to do, then?"

"Things have been disappearing—from the kitchen and the store in the basement. More than Bridget thought. It seems Mrs. Malone has been missing things as well, and didn't say anything about it. There are always fewer potatoes in the sacks than there should be, and there was a sack of flour she thought the rats had been at, but there's no sign of rats. She put poison down, and nothing happened. The bait wasn't taken."

She was in full flood, and excited by it all. Her face was flushed, and her voice got louder as she spoke. She said:

"We're going to put a watch on tonight, to see what happens."

Cherry said: "The same ones who had a look down in the tower?"

"And anyone else who's interested."

"I think I'll join you," Cherry said.

She was smiling. Waring said: "I'll help swell the number, too."

"Well," Helen said, "that's fine. Makes it quite a party."

She also was smiling. Waring looked into her face, and looked away. Where was the loneliness and wistfulness, the humanity, now? She was openly gloating at having him back in line, the running dog brought to heel. The dots were back on the graph line.

They talked it over after dinner. The longer this went on, and the more seriously it was taken, the more convinced Waring was that it was a hoax, inspired by the talk of the little people, which was in turn started off by Helen's reference to his own experience. That experience, he was now persuaded, had been an hallucination.

The mind played tricks; no one knew that better than he did. You got them, consistently and predictably, in fevers, or by the use of drugs, or through alcohol. And, rarely and without warning, they happened apparently spontaneously to well, undrugged, non-alcoholic people. Which meant only that the causation was obscure and no one had done any work on it. It was difficult to see how anyone could—you needed a body of phenomena, a mass of data, before you could start drawing inferences.

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Contemplating the subsequent hoax, he was on firmer ground. The trickery of the conscious mind was well documented and of long and dishonourable history. One could analyse the incident, whittle out the improbabilities, and be left with a high probability of something like the truth. And Helen, he was forced to admit, had turned the key in the lock. It all stemmed from the footprint, and the position of the footprint was vital. No one would have spotted it out there by the foot of the tower without Daniel taking them and rubbing their noses in it. Mat had picked that up, and someone had defended Daniel. Who? He thought back, and got it. Bridget! If he had been faking, she argued, he would have left the mark for someone else to find, and would have placed it nearer the house.

Waring thought about that. The counter from Mat—that it would have involved the danger of being spotted—had been feeble; there was little chance of that if it were done in the dawn hours. But there were more cogent arguments. One was that it was necessary to be quite sure that the impression *was* seen, and even if it were left right outside the backdoor, it was quite possible that they would miss it, or fail to identify it. You could go on for days, renewing it, and not be sure of success. The other was that the footprint needed to be near the hole in the tower wall, where the stone had been carefully rubbed, the earth scuffed, a piece of thread ingeniously caught in a crack. From which point you went, naturally enough, to an exploration of the inside of the tower, and finding a candy wrapper and a stub of candle.

Daniel then, primarily, but not Daniel alone. Mat? He was the one who had been sure the candle had not been there a week earlier. Waring dismissed that. He was not the man for it, and it had been he who had accused Daniel of faking. Whereas Bridget had, fairly plausibly, defended him. Waring gave a small inward sigh of satisfaction. It fitted well enough.

She was a capable young woman, and an enterprising one. She had taken on the running of this place as a guest house, and she was putting her back into it. But it must be hard going, and she was making no fortune from it. On the other hand, if a story were to get out into the newspapers and television—a story about little people living in a ruined tower in a wild part of Ireland . . . There would be no empty rooms, and she would be turning them away by the drove. Handled right, it could be kept going for several years, long enough for the place to become established in its own right, or for clever Miss Chauncey to unload it at a nice profit.

And Daniel was her fiance. It made a pretty good arrangement.

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They were talking, he realized, about this business of keeping a watch. They were taking it with varying kinds of seriousness—Stefan earnest, Helen euphoric, Mat with a dogged melancholy. Credit that, too, to clever Miss Chauncey: it was something to keep the guests interested in a place that had few resources by way of more normal forms of entertainment. Daniel, he noted, was playing it pretty cool, which also figured.

Things had been missing both from the kitchen and from the store rooms below. It was argued that there should therefore be two parties, one on each spot. They argued undecidedly about the best way of splitting up for that. Bridget said:

"Please yourselves." She smiled. "I'm going to bed. I don't think there's anything to see, and I shall be too tired to wait up, anyway."

Which was, Waring thought with admiration, exactly the right way to react. He wondered if some kind of stunt had been dreamed up to carry things a stage further. Daniel was going to be *en scene*, even if Bridget was conveniently out of the way. He decided there was more in it for him than just keeping Helen sweet: it was going to be amusing watching all this.

They sorted themselves out in due course. Helen and Mat plumped for a post in the kitchen, Stefan and Daniel for keeping watch down below. Cherry opted for the kitchen, as well. Partly, he thought, because of Helen, but perhaps a little because of the Irishman. She had been staying close to him during the day, talking to him quite garrulously for her, and studying him with what Waring judged to be interest. He was not at all unhappy about that. Mat was handsome enough, but pretty obviously both shy and slow with members of the opposite sex.

Hanni, like Bridget, said she would go to bed. She did not seem at all sure as to what was happening. Stefan explained to her in German, but she still looked lost. Waring himself said he would join the party below stairs. That, he guessed, was where things were likely to happen.

They agreed there was no point in starting the watch until their normal bed time. Until then they passed the time talking and drinking. Going downstairs, Waring realized that he had just about two drinks more than he regarded as suitable for an evening. He was aware of being elated, and found his arm describing a wider than usual arc in grasping the door knob. They had left the three in the kitchen settled in chairs, with no lights but the smaller of the two available torches. Daniel had the other torch. Which, Waring noted with satisfaction, gave him a commanding position.

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The house, like the tower, had been built on rock. Ribs and outcrops were in evidence, as also were signs of the castle which had been here before it. The cellar floors were paved with flagstones, some three feet by two, and the walls were a mixture of large cut stones and brick. The area taken up was smaller than the ground floor, but like it bisected by a central corridor. On one side, access to the chambers was by means of low but wide stone arches; there were a couple of similar arches on the other side, but for the rest the rooms had brick walls and stout wooden doors. Most of them lacked separate lighting, but there were three light bulbs altogether in the corridor, one in the middle and one at either end.

Daniel said: "Better check first to make sure it's all clear."

Waring nodded. Nothing up my sleeves, before the rabbit comes out of the hat. He and Stefan followed Daniel as he walked to the far end, flashing the torch into the entrance. Helen had spoken of the amount of junk in the basement of the tower. There was a hell of a lot here, too. Refuse, Waring knew, was disposed of by being carted out into the bog—there was a man who came once a month from the village to dig a new hole for it—and it was understandable that one thought twice before trying to get rid of anything bigger than an empty can that way. Even so, it was staggering how much had accumulated.

Apart from the rubbish, there were a couple of small rooms with wine racks, mostly empty he was grieved to see, and the store rooms. These, as was reasonable, were near the stairs, though the archway at the foot of the stairs gave onto a chamber packed with broken and discarded furniture. The store rooms had lights, which Daniel switched on.

"Seems O.K.," he said. "We could take a room each. Not much point in our sticking together."

Not, Waring agreed silently, if you are going to have room to maneuver. He nodded.

"Which one are you taking?"

Daniel shrugged. "It doesn't matter. But if I'm having the torch I suppose I'd better be nearest the stairs. We aren't going to be as lucky as the ones up above as far as seating goes. I suppose we could bring chairs down, if you think it worth while."

"There are sacks," Stefan said, "and boxes." He pointed to the room next to Daniel's. "This will do me."

"Then I'll go opposite," Waring said. It offered a good vantage point. He found a wooden crate which was suitable for sitting on, and dusted it off. "We all ready for action?"

Daniel said: "I'll snap the lights off as soon as you're comfortable. O.K.? Right, then."

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There was darkness except for the darting beam of the torch as Daniel found his own perch; then that, too, went and the blackness was absolute. So was the silence. The other men were only a few yards away from him, but he could hear nothing of them, or anything else. The dankness of the air was in his nostrils and seemed to lie on his tongue. It would be difficult to keep food from spoiling down here once it was opened.

Someone—Stefan, he thought—coughed once, and the quietness flowed in on the sound like a river. There was no particular point in striving to keep senses alert—with so complete an absence of stimuli, any tiny disturbance would rivet the attention. It was an opportunity for reverie, for pondering fundamentals, like Helen and himself and the messes, joint and several, they had made of their lives. The hell with that, he thought. The subject had taken up too much of his time and energy, and to no good purpose. Think of something good. Think of Cherry.

The sound jarred him out of that dream. He felt his head jerk round, his body tense. It was a small sound, unidentifiable. Mechanical? Something being dragged—shifted? He wondered if the others had heard it. Then he realized he had been treating it as genuine. Probably Daniel had caused it. It came from a different direction, from the end wall, but that didn't mean anything. He could easily have taken his shoes off and sneaked across there in his stockinged feet. He was the one with the torch. On the other hand, there was nothing to stop Stefan or himself from moving fast and getting to the light switch. No, wait, he thought. Let the programme get under way.

There were other sounds, louder and more purposeful. Stefan must have heard them as well. The little men shifting furniture? And a whispering, too small and sibilant to be comprehensible, but without doubt meant to be communication. Waring's skin prickled with a sudden cold fear. But that was nonsense. Anyone could fake sounds nowadays. You plant a battery tape recorder in among the junk, fiddle with the speed control . . . As fear subsided, irritation took its place. Did he have to be so goddam elaborate? And what kind of fools did he think Stefan and Waring were, to stay rooted in the dark while this racket went on a few yards away? Abruptly, Waring got to his feet.

Light came before he could do more than that. The shifting oval projected from the torch swung fast along the wall, exposing old brick, a broken wooden rack, the heap of junk by the wall. And they were there—against all reason and logic, but there. Two of them, reacting fast as the beam revealed

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them, darting into the shadows of the tunnel which had been made through the rubbish, gone almost as soon as glimpsed, but the images in that instant seared on the mind, beyond any possibility of doubt. This was no trick of light or fatigue, but grotesque reality. He heard Stefan cry out something, but in his shock and bemusement failed to take it in.

Daniel switched on the light. "A bit of bad luck there," he said. "I should have let them get further into the open, but when you moved, Waring, I thought it would alert them."

Waring said: "I'm sorry."

"Not important. At least, we've seen them. Three of us. Whatever they are."

He said, still numb: "Then what I saw in the moonlight . . ."

"I should think so. Except it looked feminine to you, while those two—well, that was male dress they were wearing."

"So you think . . . ?"

Stefan interrupted. "Look."

His voice was thick. Turning to him first, Waring saw his jowling face tensed, in concentration and perhaps in awe. He followed Stefan's look. She stood in the far corner, pressed hard against the angle of the walls.

As they advanced on her, Waring was expecting her to cry out or try to dart away. But she stayed there, silent, motionless, her little eyes staring up into their giant's faces.

(*to be continued next month*)

COMING NEXT MONTH

Those readers who know the work of the late Robert E. Howard need no introduction to his most memorable character, a gigantic and belligerent adventurer called Conan the Cimmerian. Next month we offer a brand-new Conan story, written by L. Sprague de Camp from a recently discovered Howard outline. It's called THE HALL OF THE DEAD, and it pits Conan against as appalling a crew of adversaries as we have seen since those giant ants came out of the sewers. Plenty of action for everybody.

Of course, we'll also bring you part two of John Christopher's new novel next month. The February issue is on sale January 3. Or, use the order form on page 4. It's good for your own subscription as well as for gifts.

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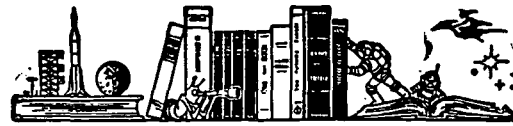
BOOKS



TWO PIECES OF INFORMATION came my way this past month—neither one entirely surprising, both a bit shocking in their effect on me. The first, and sadder, item, I will leave for last; the second was more of a reminder than a discovery—the celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Herbert George Wells.

That is to say, it is more than seventy years now since the publication of THE TIME MACHINE, and almost thirty-five since the production of *The Shape of Things to Come,* the two works which effectively span Wells' career as a writer of "scientific romances."

I knew this before. But the fact is, I have been in the habit of regarding Wells simply as one of the rather-better contemporary writers. I don't think I have ever re-read anything of his—and it is perhaps the lack of any impulse to do so that accounts for the "rather." I have simply read his stories, (some of them quite recently), not with that faint almost-inevitable adjustment I make for even the best of the turn-of-the-century writers, nor with the slightly exaggerated attentiveness one may bring to that which classifies, by age and virtue, as "classic," but with the spontaneous interest and pleasure that, for me, derives specifically (and all too seldom recently) from good science fiction.

It was somewhat startling, then, to be forcibly reminded that THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU, for instance, was already fifty years old when I read it. I had even then read any number of later, and duller, variations on the theme; I have read many more since, and none of them stay as fresh and exciting in my mind.

I have *not* re-read Wells, and I should have to do so to be sure of this, but I incline to think still that he was not, in the usual sense, a "great writer"—at least not of fiction—but rather a genuinely original thinker. The "mainstream" novels, after all, have not lasted as well as the science fiction, and of the s-f, the most vivid, memorable titles are not primarily those that dealt with specific technological and biological extrapolations, on the precise predictive scale now considered "solid science fiction."

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THE TIME MACHINE, *Things To Come,* DR. MOREAU, "The Invisible Man," THE FOOD OF THE GODS, "The Country of the Blind," THE WAR OF THE WORLDS, "The Man Who Could Work Miracles" —these all contain the essence of Wells. His utopian dreams are dated; but his visions—both glorious and terrifying—of the age of scientific man are as contemporary and meaningful today as they were in 1900, because they were about ideas, not gadgets. They deal not just with isolated instances, but with the nature of the interaction between man and his own inventions, between the natural and technological worlds, between conditioning and reasoned thought.

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS caused even more of a sensation when Orson Welles broadcast it in 1938, than when it was first published forty years earlier—not just because of the effectiveness of the broadcast, but because its underlying statement, only vaguely visible in 1898, was terrifyingly clear in the tension of the thirties. It was not (just) a story about Martians or their machines of war, but a powerful prophetic statement of the implications of truly scientific global war. *The Shape of Things to Come* was a more direct statement on the same theme, but it remained, for more than thirty years, the most memorable film of its kind,* not because of "special effects" or monsters or metal marvels, but because it grew out of the same deep-rooted comprehension of the realities of modern war for real people. Even the seemingly light fantasies are, again and always, essentially concerned with the still-desperate conflicts and ambivalences of modern man in search of the new kind of soul he needs to abide in the world of his own making.

It is obvious to me that I have under-rated Wells, till now, in at least one respect, and I suspect I have done him too little honor in another way as well. The popular habit of regarding fiction values as the prime component of "greatness" in contemporary prose writers is insidious, and clearly inadequate.

The general function of fiction is to provide surrogate experience: sensations, insights, activities, emotions. Its principal residue (beyond the remembered pleasure which is the legacy of any art) is in the personality rather than the intellect of the reader: an increment in perception, a growth of empathy, and emotional potential. This function is served as well, though differently, by drama, bardic poetry, and some forms of graphic art.

**It is too soon to say, I suppose, but the chances are that* Dr. Strangelove *will endure as well.*

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The little literary province currently known as science fiction is essentially a medium for readers, not viewers; a stimulant for the mind rather than a tranquillizer for the soul. Whether it acts as science lesson or social criticism, gadget-extrapolator or philosophic depth-probe—whether its objectives are an infusion of information or an interpretation of already-known facts—its determining characteristic is that it must leave the reader in a state of heightened mental activity.

Ideally, when good science fiction is also good fiction, it accomplishes both purposes. In practice, the combined accomplishment is almost vanishingly rare, on any really significant level. But there are other kinds of good or even great writing; Wells perhaps utilized the fiction form, not so much for its unique values as simply to make use of its current popularity as entertainment to gain a broader audience for philosophic writing.

The use of science fiction as a popular medium for philosophy is familiar; fantasy fiction as a vehicle for symbols and images of the less conscious level otherwise largely confined to poetry, is equally traditional. The current emergence of what appears to be a combination of these modes—the use of science fantasy as rationalized image, to make a multi-leveled statement of intellectual and symbolic content—is too new a process to be "assessed" in any realistic manner. But the significance of the trend is already established beyond question. It is not confined to writers inside the narrow enclave of category science fiction, but its most direct line of development has occurred there, and its practice at the moment seems most successful in the hands of writers whose major background is in s-f.

The trend is typified in England by J. G. Ballard. Until a short time ago, its outstanding American practitioner was the man known as "Cordwainer Smith," the late Professor Paul A. Linebarger of Johns Hopkins University.

This is, of course, my other piece of news, and I take what small satisfaction is available in paying his true identity the respect we have been obliged to give to the Smith facade until now.

I did not hear of his death until a month after it happened. The news was not surprising; he had been ill for some time. I knew him, not closely, but gratefully, and could not seize the opportunity for closer acquaintance provided by the coincidence of our residences in Washington last winter, because the strain imposed on him by visitors was obvious. I find it difficult now to separate the sense of loss of a remarkable human being from the feeling of depriva-

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tion as a reader. Both because his loss is too recent, and his work remains too new, I shall not be so presumptuous as to attempt any general discussion of his accomplishments in this article. When the inevitable re-publications and comprehensive editions of his work appear, I will undoubtedly have much more to say.

For now, those who valued his work as I did will want to know that at least one book is currently on the stands—a grouping as demi-novel of the four Casher O'Neill stories, under the title QUEST OF THE THREE WORLDS*.

Examining the new books against the renewed background of Wells, and from the advanced position reached by "Smith," the most noteworthy is probably Fred Hoyle's OCTOBER THE FIRST IS TOO LATE*—certainly his most exciting piece of fiction, conceptually, since THE BLACK CLOUD. Although it lacks some of the plot-and-structure qualities of the last two ANDROMEDA novels (for which one assumes the collaborator, John Eliot, must have been primarily responsible), this book for the first time seems to me to be written at a level commensurate with Hoyle's best non-fiction work. The theory of time around which the book is built is both fascinating and abstruse, and Hoyle makes full use, this time, of his unique capacity to distill complex abstractions into simple, lucid, and very readable prose.

I shall not attempt to emulate his success, but limit myself to recommending the book to anyone interested in the current investigations of time. In addition to the basic exposition, the situation Hoyle derives from his time theory is as bizarre, intriguing, and imaginatively provocative as anything in recent fiction. Time has cracked, as it were: the entire globe is broken into a crazy-quilt of time zones. Between Honolulu, where the narrator is situated, and England, the gap is only two weeks; but France is almost half a century behind them both—still fighting World War I; Greece is in the Periclean Age; the USSR in a vast and featureless Ozymandian future. North America appears to be in the 18th Century.

The possibilities implicit in the situation are immediately apparent, and Hoyle starts out to develop them with originality and thoughtfulness—not just the customary scientific and philosophic explorations of past and future civilizations, but—for instance—the conflict of historical and commercial-tourist interests in classical Greece, and the marvellously complicated economic and

*QUEST OF THE THREE WORLDS, Cordwainer Smith; Ace F-402, 1966; 174 pp.; 40¢.
*OCTOBER THE FIRST IS TOO LATE, Fred Hoyle; Harper & Row, 1966; 200 pp.; $3.95.

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political shifts and stresses in Europe, as England explodes into the world of 1918 with the technology and post-empire pacifism of the sixties.

Unfortunately, Hoyle develops these possibilities just enough to fascinate—and tantalize—and then falls back into not one, but both of the conventional time-travel-story routines: the extrapolation of an early period of history, as viewed through the time traveller's eye; and the vision of tomorrow's maybe-Utopia. As tends to happen with Utopias, things get rather dull and disappointing.

But at least he was willing to try. If the plot falters before the ideas, nevertheless there is a steady stream of speculation. This is first-rate science-fiction; and while it is not 'literature' in the sense in which we usually measure the artistic merits of fiction, it ranks very high (or some sections of it do) in that province of literature known as "belles lettres," in which the speculative essay is a special and important art.

Rosel George Brown's long-overdue first novel, SYBIL SUE BLUE* is something, believe me, *else*. You have never read a science fiction novel anything like this before, and if you have read any other kind of novel very much like it, I'd appreciate being informed. Sybil Sue is the swingingest mama since—well, *since*. She is a policewoman, forty or close to it, passionately devoted (in no definite order of precedence) to her job, her beautiful sixteen-year-old daughter, her (probably) dead space-exploring husband, Gin-and-'gin, and good cigars. Her skill with a rabbit punch or wielding her stiletto heel is fabulous. In the right light she can pass as her daughter's classmate, but her sex habits are definitely not teen-age. She is very fond of men, and they of her.

This (first only, one hopes) Sybil Sue book recounts her adventures rounding up the benzale pushers from Radix.

And the damnedest part of it is that under all the froth and fun and furious action, there is more acute comment on contemporary society than you are likely to find in any half dozen deadly serious social novels.

In what I believe to be another first novel* Gertrude Friedberg (whose "Short and Happy Death of George Frumkin" in this magazine three years ago will be remembered by others beside myself) proposes an idea I have actually not read before. It is not a large dramatic theme, but it is original, and even more astonishing, combines some sound specu-

*SYBIL SUE BLUE, Rosel George Brown; Doubleday, 1966; 183 pp.; $3.95.
*THE REVOLVING BOY, Gertrude Friedberg; Doubleday, 1966; 191 pp.; $3.95.

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lation with good writing and effective story-telling. It would be damaging, I think, to the first part of the book to discuss the essential idea here, but I will drop a possibly misleading clue: I think she has been reading Hoyle.

Neither as intellectually exciting as OCTOBER THE FIRST, nor as wildly entertaining as Sybil Sue's story, THE REVOLVING BOY is a better balance of both elements than either of the others.

Two recent anthologies, each excellent in its way, provide an interesting, if not entirely hopeful, cross-section of the science fiction generation extending from Wells to "Smith." Arthur Clarke's TIME PROBE* concentrates on the period between 1940 and 1950 when *Astounding* was the undisputed center, and leader, of the field, and produced a kind of fiction which is still, by and large, the accepted standard of what good solid category science fiction should be. Six of the eleven selections are from that magazine in that decade. (Two are from more recent issues —1955 and 1962—of the same publication; one from *Amazing* of 1927; one each from *Infinity* and *Fantastic Universe* in 1957.) The tone, even in the later stories, is definitely vintage Campbell, with only some elusive overtones (in the stories by Kornbluth, Vance and Schmitz) of the Boucher and Gold influences in the fifties.

NEBULA AWARD STORIES*, although it lists Damon Knight as editor, is essentially a selection by vote of the members of the new Science Fiction Writers of America, the first volume of a projected annual series, containing of course, only stories first published (in the U.S.) in 1965.

The contrast between the two books is marked. The writers have selected two pieces by Roger Zelazny—"The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of his Mouth" (*F&SF*) and "He Who Shapes" (*Amazing*) —Brian Aldiss' "The Saliva Tree" (*F&SF*), and Harlan Ellison's "'Repent, Harlequin' Said the Ticktockman" (*Galaxy*) as prizewinners for the year; the remaining four are James H. Schmitz's "Balanced Ecology," Larry Niven's "Becalmed in Hell," Gordon R. Dickson's "Computers Don't Lie," and J. G. Ballard's already near-classic "The Drowned Giant." All in all, the book leans heavily toward concentration on polish and technique, and the basic fiction values, and is little concerned with idea content.

*TIME PROBE: The Sciences in Science Fiction, ed., Arthur C. Clarke; Delacorte, 1966; 11 stories, 242 pp.; $4.95.
*NEBULA AWARD STORIES, 1965, ed., Damon Knight; Doubleday, 1966; 7 stories, 295 pp.; $4.95.

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To a great extent, this trend is characteristic of the change in s-f over the last twenty years, and I suppose that, as one of the most earnest supporters of the trend, it ill behooves me now to cry, ". . . but I never meant it to go *this* far!" Nevertheless, I note with dismay that the Ellison story is the only one to fall anywhere near the new kind of idea-writing typified in different ways by "Smith" and Ballard, and that Ballard himself is represented by one of his least ideational stories. And I wonder whether Zelazny's beautifully written "Doors . . . Lamps" will stick in my mind by next year the way some of the selections in TIME PROBE have—most notably Heinlein's "And He Built a Crooked House," Leinster's "The Wabbler," and Kornbluth's "The Little Black Bag."

Yet—I tried re-reading these three, and found myself unhappily conscious of pedestrian prose and pulp practices which had impeded me not at all on first reading. I suspect that none of them—exciting as they were and memorable as they are—will survive even one generation of new readers—which leads me to suspect that work which has remained freshly exciting for three generations must have contained more vital writing than I have credited it with, and that it is past time for me to have another look at Wells.

—JUDITH MERRIL

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BOOKS RECEIVED

FICTION

THE ANTI-DEATH LEAGUE, Kingsley Amis; Harcourt, Brace & World 1966; 307 pp.; $5.95

ENSIGN FLANDRY, Poul Anderson; Chilton 1966; 203 pp.; $4.50

MOTT THE HOOPLE, Willard Manus; McGraw-Hill 1966; 250 pp.; $4.95

EARTHMEN AND STRANGERS, Robert Silverberg, ed.; Duell, Sloan & Pearce 1966; 240 pp.; $3.95 (nine stories)

BEYOND APOLLO, Jeff Sutton; Putnam 1966; 223 pp.; $3.95

POETRY

MOSTLY PEOPLE, Jeannette Nichols; Rutgers University Press 1966; 87 pp.; $4.00

GENERAL

INDEX TO THE WONDER GROUP, compiled by Fred S. Cook; 1966; 240 pp.; $5.00 (paper); index to the 13 magazines comprising the wonder group, 1929 through 1965 (available from Fred S. Cook, 503 Terrill Street, Grand Haven, Mich. 49417)

THE UNIVERSES OF E. E. SMITH, Ron Ellik and Bill Evans; Advent 1966; 272 pp.; $6.00 (includes introduction by James H. Schmitz, bibliography by Al Lewis, and illustrations by Bjo)

INTELLIGENT LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE, I. S. Shklovskii and Carl Sagan; Holden Day 1966; 509 pp. (illus., index) $8.95; a translation, extension, and revision of I. S. Shklovskii's *Vselennaia, Zhizn, Razum* (Eng. tr., *Universe, Life, Mind*) translation by Paula Fern

THE BRIDGE OF LIFE, Edmund W. Sinnott; Simon and Schuster 1966; 255 pp.; $4.95

PAPERBACKS

TRADER TO THE STARS, Poul Anderson; Berkley 1966; 159 pp.; 50¢

WORLDS FOR THE TAKING, Kenneth Bulmer; Ace 1966; 159 pp.; 40¢

WORLD OF PTAVVS, Larry Niven; Ballantine 1966; 188 pp.; 50¢

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING, T. H. White; Berkley 1966; 639 pp.; 95¢

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We've been known to raise a few huzzahs at the local driving range, but when faced with the real thing, our tee shots have a way of curling dizzily into the trees, never to be seen again. We have long given up the game for electric football, but that doesn't mean we can't appreciate a good golf game —such as that of Spaceman Ernest "Bixie" Bixon's.

THE STAR DRIVER

by J. W. Schutz

Able Spaceman Ernest (Bixie) Bixon had been a LEM pilot for seven years, and a golfer only since his last tour of duty on Earth eighteen months ago, and golf sometimes takes a more powerful grip on a man than even a LEM does. Whether Bixie was concentrating on golf or navigation before the crash will probably never be known. Bixie's own impression was that the retro-jets of his Landing and Exploration Module had simply quit twenty meters over the surface of the asteroid. Now he thought neither of golf nor of LEM's, but only of the fact that he was still breathing. He thought about it while his head stopped spinning and his eyes refocused.

Breathing meant that his helmet was intact, no gaskets had been sprung, and the fabric of his pressure suit had not been torn. It might also mean that his air tank was still supplying air, but this was not quite so certain. If the force of the crash had torn the tank away, a check-valve would have sealed the suit automatically. The next dozen breaths would tell.

In any case, the instant before the crash had not been his last. The problem now was to extend that last moment indefinitely. Bixie lay motionless and took stock.

He was now lying on his face, held down by a light but palpable gravity. A slight slant of his helmet to one side allowed him to see a rough, black surface like solidi-

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fied iron slag. He flexed his fingers slowly, then his toes. No broken bones. He turned his head gently inside his helmet. To the right the ground came up to the face-plate, too close to be seen clearly. To the left he could see to the horizon, a thousand meters away. In the foreground lay two twisted chunks of metal framework which had been parts of the Landing and Exploration Module.

"That's the last of LEM," Bixie thought.

A slight movement of his body made him aware of a mass of some sort balanced on his back. Not heavy, but substantial, it teetered ponderously. He felt sweat break out on his forehead and under his arms. The thing tipped slowly to the right, and as it toppled he scrambled to the left, hoping that whatever it might be would have no jagged edges to snatch at his pressure suit.

It didn't. It was the squat, round-ended cylindrical storage cabinet forming the largest single element of the Module.

Bixie watched its slow-motion tumbling as it bounced twice before coming to rest. Low gravity or not, the inertia of the thing, full of spare oxygen tanks, tools and mineralogical gear, should have crushed him. It had not because the full-length sliding plate that served as its door was gone, and the supplies it had contained were scattered over a large area.

Gaining control of his limbs and balance, he lumbered over to one of the precious oxygen tanks lying a hundred meters away. Its valve-stem was snapped off and the tank was obviously empty. A second tank a few steps to the right was cracked lengthwise. Of the six tanks which should have given him ninety hours of life, he found only one in possibly usable condition.

That would give him fifteen hours. It should be more than enough, he thought. All he needed was to raise the *Ceres* on the intercom and they'd send Mendel or Kelly with the reserve LEM to take him off. He felt with his gloved hand for the little radio on his breastplate. It was not there.

He tried looking for it, but the helmet's sealer-ring would not allow him to look at his own waist. He felt again, slowly and carefully with both hands, and through the heavy gloves, with their heater wires and insulation, he felt a fuzz of wire and some crumbs of plastic —all that remained of what had been his link with the mothership. A chill washed over him.

Would someone from the *Ceres* come for him when he failed to make his hourly check? Probably not. Radios had failed all too often before. They would expect him to fire a signal rocket if he were in trouble.

But where were the rockets? The doorless storage cabinet was empty

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but for a handful of plastic blast charges. Thank God they could not be set off by shock! He hadn't noticed the rockets when he was searching for the oxygen tanks. But of course they were much smaller and he hadn't been looking for them. He would search again.

He was astonished at the immense area covered by the wreckage of the LEM. It was not a large machine—hardly as big as a small car—but its component parts and the small amount of gear it had contained now covered thousands of square meters. The light gravity and airlessness no doubt accounted for it, but to Bixie it seemed that something malicious had deliberately strewn things about.

Neither did the ground under his feet make the search easy. It gave the impression of a gigantic sponge, frozen in the cold of space. Cavities like half-bubbles stretched in all directions. Most were small, but there were enough larger ones to make thorough searching endless. The final complication was the absolute blackness of anything not directly lit by the asteroid's tiny, distant sun. Each cavity was a discouraging, inky pool of shadow. Still, a search must be made.

Bixie began his search by walking in ever wider circles about the empty cabinet. Every hole and wrinkle of the porous ground must be examined. An emergency rocket was only thumb-thick and a handspan long. It could easily be missed.

He was a hundred meters from the cabinet and was beginning his twenty-ninth circle when the rhythmic clicking of the reduction valve warned him that his cylinder of air was almost empty. In that time he had found nothing but a box of detonators for the plastic explosive charges. It took iron self-control to keep from breaking into a lumbering run back to the cabinet and to the one precious cylinder of oxygen he had found earlier.

For a moment he thought there might have been a pinhole in the suit. Surely the tank he was wearing should have lasted longer than that! He checked his watch, which had survived the crash, calculated the time since he had left the *Ceres,* and was reassured. It had been the full, rated fifteen hours and a bit over. God, how the time ran out!

Suppose the cylinder he had found were damaged? He hefted it, and the reduced gravity made it seem much too light. He examined the base of the valve-stem with fierce concentration. Was there a faint deposit of "frost" that would indicate a leak?

At any other time the care with which he checked and rechecked the cylinder before connecting it to the suit would have been absurd. After the surface of the cylinder proved to have no deposits of rime,

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the valve-stem was peered into, brushed, and shaken. Bixie even held it up to his face-plate and absentmindedly blew at it. When at last he decided to uncouple the tank he wore, some moments after it had clicked its last artificial breath, he turned the coupling nut a thread at a time until he felt the check-valve slam shut, indicating an open connection. He attached the new cylinder with infinite care, dreading a possible cross-threading. Then the safety-seal wire was twisted off, the needle valve turned, and the button pushed which would re-open the suit's check-valve. The manometer read "Full" and Bixie used the first breath from the new cylinder to heave a sigh of relief.

While these things were being done, a part of his brain had been making calculations based on fifteen hours—the duration of a fresh cylinder of oxygen. First there was his present distance, in hours and minutes, from the *Ceres*.

In planetoid "hopping", guesses were made based on the apparent size of an object, and these guesses could be very wide of the mark. A LEM left the mother-ship on a measured run toward the target object. At the end of the run, the change in angle subtended by two points on the target object was compared with a similar change observed in the apparent size of the mother-ship. If the target-angle change was large, no one bothered to calculate the distance. If it was small, the ship's computers quickly gave the time and distance to the target. If this was within the range of the LEM and still allowed a few hours exploration time, the mission was Go. At the end of assigned exploration time you went into open space near the target and requested a flare from the mother-ship for something visible to home on.

In the present case Bixie had taken the LEM four hours and forty-two minutes from the end of the ten-minute measured run to the arrival at the planetoid and the failure of the retros. Since a rescue mission would take equally long to get to him from the time of sighting his Mayday flare, he *must* find and fire that flare in less than ten hours and eighteen minutes.

It was three hours and twenty-four minutes later, on the thirty-seventh circle about the center point that Bixie found the flare. It was lying in a bowl-shaped depression three inches deep, and finding it had been pure luck for he had not seen it but had stepped on it and it had rolled beneath his foot. It was a rocket-flare and its stem, with fuse and igniter, were missing. He thought the fuse might have been broken off by his stepping on it, and he searched the depression in which it had lain inch by inch with his hands, but found nothing. He wasted another fifteen minutes trying to find the

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stem in nearby pits and holes and gave it up only when he realized that he might ignite it on a makeshift stem with the help of one of the detonators he had picked up earlier.

It took him five more minutes to find a stiff piece of copper tubing to serve as the stem of his rocket, and eight minutes more to find wire to attach the stem to the body of the flare.

Then he took one of the detonators from its box and considered it. In size and shape it was like a long lagscrew whose shank was headed with a double knurled nut. It was designed to be screwed into a hole in the explosive charge. Once in place, the outer nut of the head was turned like a dial to the number of seconds of delay required, after which the head was jerked out of the body of the detonator while the operator retired to a place of safety. If one end of the casing were removed it should burn rapidly instead of exploding. The difficulty was that Bixie could not remember what would happen if one end of it were cut off. Would the dial-fuse still work? Or, worse, would the thing simply explode in his fingers while he cut into it? He didn't know.

Deciding that it would be safer to saw off the end of a detonator than to cut it off suddenly with the pliers which hung at his belt, he searched for something with which to file or saw the soft metal of which it was made. He found a couple of meter-long rods of steel —one of them with a flat lump of metal on one end—and some other objects which he stacked against the storage cabinet. But it took an additional hour to find a saw-edged fragment of hard metal that would do as an adequate cutting tool. Still, now that he had the rocket-flare, time was less pressing. He still had oxygen for ten hours and eighteen minutes. After deducting the four hours and forty-two minutes it would take someone from the *Ceres* to get to him, he had a margin of five hours and thirty-six minutes of working time.

The next part became ticklish again and he found himself holding his breath as he sawed gently at the end of the detonator. He wished he could remember just how delicate this little engine was. The job was slow and his nerve tension built up steadily. When the makeshift saw finally bit through the casing of the detonator and the latter did not explode, he expelled a great breath and paused a moment to allow his trembling hands to become steady again before sawing a bit further. The end must be completely severed if the detonator was to burn like a fuse rather than to explode. By the time he had sawed all the way through he had used up another twenty-seven minutes.

With wire torn from the wreck

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of his radio-intercom, he secured the sawed-off detonator to the stem with its open end pointed upward toward the fuse-hole of the rocket. The system looked clumsy but was probably workable.

Finding a short piece of aluminum tubing, he thrust it into a pit in the ground as a launching gantry and carefully set his makeshift rocket into it. Now that everything was ready he hesitated before setting the detonator timer. He wished there was some way to guide the rocket into orbit, for, pointed straight upward, it might not be seen if the *Ceres* were on the opposite side of the asteroid. As a compromise he leaned the gantry over at a flat angle and hoped that the rocket would burn long enough to send the flare at least most of the way around the asteroid, and that it would *not* burn long enough to give the flare escape velocity, sending it off in a nearly straight line.

With fingers made clumsy by the thick insulated gloves of his suit, he twisted the detonator timer to a ten-second setting, pulled the fuse, and backed off as rapidly as he could with safety. He had counted to seventeen and was thinking the detonator might not fire at all when it began to spurt orange flame with great force.

For several seconds the rocket failed to ignite while the detonator sputtered and dimmed. Then abruptly it caught and kicked away from the aluminum channel —to rise only a yard or two from the ground, twist madly and dash itself to the surface of the asteroid. The flare, which should have burned for minutes, burst in a blinding splash of red fire which was instantly and silently extinguished in the vacuum of space.

Bixie swore bitterly as he craned his neck toward the zenith, searching for an answering flash from the *Ceres*.

There was none.

For many precious minutes he scanned the star-spattered blackness for a sign from the ship, hoping against all reason that someone had seen that flicker of fire and had understood.

At last he sat down and studied his air pressure gauge and his chronometer. Theoretically his remaining supply of air would last for nine hours and thirty-six minutes. The exact time depended upon factors such as his body weight, present metabolism, the amount of exertion the next nine hours might require of him, etc. He thanked his stars that his weight was only seventy-eight kilos rather than the average eighty-two kilos for which the oxygen cylinder was rated. This might stretch his air supply by two or three minutes. Now, if he could find a solution to attracting the *Ceres'* attention within four hours and fifty-four minutes, and *if* the ship acted at once, in four hours

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and forty-two minutes more the rescue LEM would arrive and he could heave his sigh of relief on a new cylinder of oxygen. But this was allowing no margin of safety. The thing was to find some conspicuous yell for help, and to find it fast.

He considered hunting again for rocket flares but discarded the idea after estimating how slight the chances were of finding another and successfully launching it. For, even if this could be done within the time limit, it might never be seen if the *Ceres* happened to be on the opposite side of the asteroid.

The next idea was somehow to make use of the plastic explosive charges. There were enough of them to spell out an S.O.S. in code. It was merely a question of timing the first three flashes—the "S"—at short intervals, the three of the "O" farther apart, and returning to short intervals again for the final "S." The trouble with this notion was in the brevity of the flashes as well as their being shielded by the asteroid if the ship happened to be on the wrong side. If the charges could be exploded at some distance from the surface in the bright light of the asteroid's "sun," the fairly large volume of fumes would glow brightly enough to be seen—especially if they were in motion. Ideally they should be put in orbit about the asteroid. But that was impossible.

Or was it?

Bixie searched the ground nearby for a loose stone about the size of one of the explosive charges. Although the asteroid looked huge, the gravity was only a small fraction of a standard G. He found his stone and hurled it with all his strength toward the not-too-distant horizon.

Lack of air resistance to his throwing arm almost threw him to the ground, but when he had caught his balance he watched the stone sail swiftly but majestically for many meters and many seconds. He held his breath as it seemed the stone would arch over the curve of the horizon, but just as it was almost out of sight it struck the ground and sent up a glittering puff of stone chips to catch the brilliant starlight.

It took several more tries—and the disquieting use of extra oxygen because of his exertions—to convince him that he had not the strength to achieve an orbit. He sat on the ground to get the rhythm of his breathing back to normal and to think things over.

Absently he picked up the bit of steel shaft with the lump of metal on its end which he had found earlier among the wreckage of the LEM. There was something familiar about this piece of wreckage. The weight and balance of it reminded him of something. A part of his mind worried at that while he searched his memories and ex-

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perience for some means of effecting his rescue. Suddenly it came to him—the thing in his hand was a crude golf club.

Whereas with his unassisted arm he could not put even one explosive charge into orbit, with a golf club the hard but elastic charges would fly not merely hundreds of meters but thousands. Orbiting them should be easy. To think that he had almost thrown the club away!

Feverishly he began his preparations. A flat place was found, elevated a bit above the general level of the planetoid's surface, on which he could stand, feet wedged into convenient crevices, to "tee off." Nine charges were prepared with nine detonators set for one second after the pins were pulled. Next bits of wire were attached to the pins and looped at the other end. As part of the process of "teeing up" these loops were to be slipped over a spike of metal driven into the ground. When struck, the charges would take off, leaving the detonator fuse-pin tied to the spike in the ground, and a second later the flying charges would bloom into brightly reflective puffs of white smoke.

Lord! The smoke *was* white, wasn't it? Yes, it had to be, considering what Bixie could recall of its composition.

It was only when the mechanical details were attended to that Bixie thought of the physical difficulties of the feat he proposed to attempt. He had to make nine successive perfect drives, cumbered by a space suit, under conditions which, to put it mildly, were unfamiliar on any golf course. He tried to remember if he had ever made nine perfect drives in playing a nine-hole round. Or even on the practice tee. He couldn't recall. He thought not.

He took a few swings experimentally. The lack of air resistance was disconcerting. With very little force the clubhead seemed to move like a bullet. Inertial reaction threw his body off balance backward, then, at the end of the swing, the clubhead's mass reasserted itself and yanked him brutally upright again.

He teed up a pebble about the size of one of the charges. He took his stance, knees slightly flexed, left arm straight, and brought the clubhead back slowly. Then, willing himself fiercely to keep his head down, and not to forget any of the hundred and one things that went into a good drive, he swung.

There was no click of club striking "ball" as there would have been in an air-pressure environment, but on the other hand, although Bixie was sure he had sliced slightly, the stone did not curve off to the right as it would have done in air. It flew straight, rising into the bright light as it did so, and he was sure he had easily achieved an orbit.

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A little over two minutes later his pebble appeared from the opposite direction as a bright moving spark. He watched it approach until it brushed the ground not far from the tee from which it had been driven. This would be a drawback. Without midcourse control adjusting the orbit, anything would come back to the point of departure, brushing the ground and distorting or destroying the second orbit. Still, one complete orbit was a great deal better than none.

He laid out his explosive charges in three groups of three, methodically and as calmly as he was able. He took several careful practice swings and then, without further hesitation, rhythmically sent off his first group to form the "dot," "dot," "dot" of the first Morse "S." It was not until after the third swing that he dared to raise his head.

His heart leaped. In the vacuum of space the freely expanding cloud of vapor from the first explosion was already enormous and brightly white. The second was nearly as large, and the third had just burst with a bright flash as he looked up.

The second group was sent off more slowly; "dot," pause, "dot," pause, "dot" in what he hoped would be interpreted as an "O." So far none of his drives had been faulty.

Suddenly he wished this last thought had not crossed his mind. His hands began to tremble uncontrollably. With tremendous effort he steadied his hands and sent off the final "S." The strain of holding to an even rhythm and force was so great that his forearms ached.

As the last huge puff of vapor swung majestically over the horizon, Bixie sat on the ground and looked at his timepiece. His "golf game" had, with its preparations, taken him nearly an hour. Exactly four hours from now the reserve LEM must be on its way or it would reach him after he had drawn his last breath.

The worst of it was that the mother-ship must sight his signal in the next two-minute orbit because there was not likely to be more than one.

Bixie scanned the sky tensely. The seconds ticked off. Nothing. Suddenly he saw a flash of white on the horizon. Then another, and a third. His heart bounded up, then fell as he realized that what he saw was his own signal swinging around the curve of the planetoid. He watched as his clearly spelled-out SOS became fully visible. He had a moment of pride and fondled his ersatz golf club which had sent off nine successive perfect drives. Then abruptly he was scrambling out of the way as the mountain-sized white spheres bore down on him at dizzying speed.

The next moment he was laugh-

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ing hysterically. The clouds of vapor had swept through the place where he had been standing. Ducking them had been unnecessary. They were completely intangible.

As each sphere of smoke brushed the launching site its lower half was swept away against the ground where it dissipated into an almost imperceptible fog. The upper half rushed away into a second orbit as an undistorted hemisphere. Two or more orbits were possible.

The last of the nine glowing hemispheres had just winked out of sight when he saw the green flash from the *Ceres*. They had seen the SOS!

Bixie danced. He sang. He baptised the club his Celestial Driver and belted pebbles off in all directions. And then he sat down carefully on the ground and fainted dead away.

When Mendel, riding the relief LEM, found him, he revived only long enough to clutch his synthetic golf club in a vice-like grip, then passed out again. Mendel routinely connected a fresh cylinder of oxygen into Bixie's suit, lashed him—and his club—to the LEM with a length of safety line, took half a dozen photos of the remains of Bixie's vehicle, and returned to the *Ceres*.

In the airlock the ship's Medical Officer asked no questions but gave Bixie a heavy sedative shot and sent him off to the infirmary, golf club and all, since he refused to part with it.

At Mendel's debriefing the Captain himself asked about it.

"Mr. Mendel, have you any idea why Mr. Bixon insisted on bringing back that bit of wreckage? Is it crash evidence, perhaps?"

Mendel could not repress a smile. "In the airlock he said it was a golf club, Sir."

"Hmm. I see." The Captain shook his head. "How about that SOS? How did he do that?"

Mendel looked puzzled. "I don't know, Sir," he said.

"Well, find out," the Captain growled. "I want every LEM-jockey in the Company to know that trick and be able to reproduce it!"

From somewhere between the stars an obscure Scottish Saint smiled down approvingly.

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INTERPLANETARY DUST

by Ted Thomas

THE STUDY OF DUST IN INTERplanetary space grows more important year by year. This dust, after all, is part of the space environment. Men now move around in space. It is important to know such factors as the abrasiveness of the dust, the charge it may carry, its concentration, and its effects on objects that travel through it. Right now nobody knows much about it.

By definition, these dust particles are solid objects in space that have linear dimensions smaller than about 100 microns. No one is certain of the chemical structure. Even the shape is up for grabs. One of the high-flying rockets brought back a particle that was thought to be a speck of interplanetary dust, and its shape was pretty messy. It looked more like a splat of ink than a spherical dust particle. Scientists assume that the dust particles are either iron or glass since that's the composition of meteorites. At the moment, the dust is thought to originate from the asteroid belt and from the comets that traverse the Solar System periodically.

Many of the studies on interplanetary dust have assumed that the individual dust particles carry an electric charge. Although there has not been much agreement on the size of the charge, most scientists think the charge is positive. If the particles have a charge at all, some interesting possibilities arise.

Perhaps right now we should start to place in orbit some gigantic screens carrying a charge opposite that of the dust particles. The screens would collect the dust. We could construct from the screens an enormous dust collecting system that would sweep space clean as the Earth went its majestic way. In the course of time we might collect enough solids to make a small satellite. If we kept at it we might make ourselves a fair-size place to live on. A population explosion is upon us, and the world's people will soon need all the real estate they can get.

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Back in the days when New Yorkers had a few newspapers to read, James Gibbons Huneker was the distinguished music critic for the New York Sun. (*No, Virginia, there is no* Sun.) *His criticisms, said one journal, "combine German accuracy with French grace, and above all with American independence and freedom of speech." At Fritz Leiber's suggestion, we read some of Huneker's fiction, and we think you will enjoy this rich and entertaining sample, which was first published in 1902.*

THE DISENCHANTED SYMPHONY

by James G. Huneker

The Earth hath bubbles—

—MACBETH.

POBLOFF BEGAN TO WHISTLE the second theme of his symphony. He was a short, round-bellied man with a high head upon which stood quill-like hair; when he smiled, his little lunar eyes closed completely, and his vast mouth opened—a trap filled with white blocks of polished bone; when he laughed, it sounded like a snorting tuba. . . . Nature had hesitated whether to endow him with the profile of Punch or Napoleon. He was dark, not in the least dangerous, and a native of Russia, though long a resident of Balak. Pobloff's wife dusted the music on the top of his old piano. "In God's name, Luga, let my manuscript in peace," he adjured her. She snapped at him, but he continued whistling. "More original music?" She was ironically inquisitive as she danced about the white porcelain stove; tumbled over scores that littered the apartment as grass grown wild in a deserted alley; pushed violin cases that rattled; upset an empty bird-cage and finally threw wide back the metal-slatted shutters, admitting an inundation of sunshine. . . . It was early May, but in Balak, with its southeastern Europe climate, the weather was warm as a July day in Paris. "Hurrah!" Pobloff suddenly bellowed, "I have it, I have it!" Luga glanced at him sourly. "I suppose you'll set the world on fire this time for sure, my man; and then little Richard Strauss will be ask-

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ing for advice! What are you going to call the new symphonic poem, Pobloff? Oh, name it after me!" She shrieked down the passage way at a slouching maid, and ran out, leaving Pobloff jolly and unruffled.

"Ouf!" he ejaculated, as her sarcasm finally penetrated his consciousness, "I'll call it 'The Fourth Dimension'—that's what I will. Luga! Where's that idle cat? Luga, some tea, tea, I'm thirsty." And he again whistled the second theme of his new symphony.

Pobloff loved mathematics more than music—and he adored music. He was fond of comparing the two, and often quoted Leibnitz: "Music is an occult exercise of the mind unconsciously performing arithmetical calculations." For him, so he assured his friends, music was a species of sensual mathematics. Before he left St. Petersburg to settle in Balak as its Kapellmeister he had studied at the University under the famous Lobatchewsky and absorbed from him not a few of the radical theories containing the problematic fourth dimension. He read with avid interest of J. K. F. Zollner's experiments which drove that unfortunate Leipzig physicist into incurable melancholia. Ah, what madmen these! Perpetual motion, squaring the circle, the fourth spatial dimension—all new variants of the old alchemical mystery, the vain pursuit of the philosophers' stone, the transmutation of the baser metals, the cabalistic Abracadabra, the quest of the absolute! Yet sincere and certainly quite sane men of scientific training had considered seriously this mathematic hypothesis. Cayley, Pobloff had read, and Abbot's "Flatland"; while the ingenious speculations of W. K. Clifford and the American, Simon Newcomb, fascinated him immeasurably. He cared little—being idealist and musician—for the grosser demonstrations of hypernormal phenomena, though for a time he had wavered before the mysterious cross-roads of demoniac possession, subliminal divinations, and the strange rappings that emanate from souls smothered in hypnotic slumber. The testimony of such a man as Professor Crookes who had witnessed feats of human levitation greatly stirred him; but in the end he drifted back to his early passions—music and mathematics.

Zollner had proved to his own satisfaction the existence of a fourth dimension, when he turned an India-rubber ball inside out without tearing it; but Pobloff, a man of tone, was more absorbed in the demonstration that Time could be shown in two dimensions. He often quoted Hugh Craig, who compared Time to a river always flowing, yet a permanent river: If one emerged from this stream at a certain moment and entered it an hour later, would it not signify

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that Time had two dimensions? And music—where did music stand in the eternal scheme of things? Was not harmony with its vertical structure and melody's horizontal flow, proof that music itself was but another dimension in Time? In the vast and complicated scores of Richard Strauss, the listener has set in motion two orders of auditions: he hears the music both horizontally and vertically. This combination of the upright and the transverse amused Pobloff immensely. He declared, with his inscrutable giggle, that all other arts were childish in their demands upon the intellect when compared to music. "You can see pictures, poems, sculpture, and architecture—but music you must hear, see, feel, smell, taste, to apprehend it rightfully: and all at the same time!" Pobloff shook his head and tried to look solemn. "Think of it! With every sense and several more besides, going in different directions, brilliantly sputtering like wet fireworks, roaring like mighty cataracts! Ah, it was a noble, crazy art, and the only art, except poetry, that moved. All the rest are beautiful gestures arrested. . . .

Pobloff ate five meals a day, and sometimes expanding his chest to its utmost and extending his arms to the zenith, yawned prodigiously. Born a true pessimist, he often was bored to the extreme by existence. In addition to the fortnightly symphony concerts and their necessary rehearsals, he did nothing but compose and dream of new spaces to conquer. He was a Czar over his orchestra, and though a fat, good-humored man, had a singularly nasty temper.

Convinced that in music lay the solution of this particular mathematical problem, he had been working for over a year on a symphonic poem which he jocularly christened "The Abysm." Untouched by his wife's daily tauntings—she was an excellent musician and harpist in his band—he could not help admitting to his interior self, that she was right in her aspersions on his originality: Richard Strauss had shown him the way. Pobloff decided to leave map and compass behind, and march out with his music into some new country or other—he did not much care where. Could but the fourth dimension be traced to tone, to his tones, then would his name resound throughout the ages; for what was the feat of Columbus compared with this exploration of a vaster spiritual America! Pobloff trembled. He was so transported by the idea, that his capacious frame and large head became enveloped in a sort of magnetic halo. He diffused enthusiasm as a swan sheds water; and his men did not grumble at the numerous extra rehearsals, for they realized that their chief might make an important discovery.

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The composer was a stern believer in absolute music. For him the charms of scenery, lights, odor, costume, singers, and the subtle voice of the prompter seemed factitious, mere excrescences on the fair surface of art. But he was a born colorist and sought to arouse the imagination by stupendous orchestral effects, frescoes of tone wherein might be discerned terrifying perspectives, sinister avenues of drooping trees melting into iron dusks. If Pobloff was a mathematician, he was also a painter-poet. He did not credit the theory of the alienists, that the confusion of tone and color—*audition coloree*—betrayed the existence of a slight mental lesion; and he laughed consumedly at the notion of confounding musicians with madmen.

"Then my butcher and baker are just as mad," he asserted; and swore that a man could both pray and think of eating at the same time. Why should the highly organized brain of a musician be considered abnormal because it could see tone, hear color, and out of a mixture of sound and silence, fashion images of awe and sweetness for a wondering, unbelieving world? If Man is a being afloat in an ocean of vibrations, as Maurice de Fleury wrote, then any or all vibrations are possible. Why not a synthesis? Why not a transposition of the *neurons*—according to Ramon Y Cajal being little erectile bodies in the cells of the cortex, stirred to reflex motor impulse when a message is sent them from the sensory nerves? The crossing of filaments occurs oftener than imagined, and Pobloff, knowing these things, had boundless faith in his enterprise. So when he cried aloud, "I have it!" he really believed that at last he saw the way clear, and his symphonic poem was to be the key which would unlock the great mystery of existence.

Rehearsal had been called at eight o'clock, a late hour for Balak, which rises early only to get ready the sooner for the luxury of a long afternoon siesta. The conductor of the Royal Filharmonie Orchestra had sent out brief enough notice to his men, but they were in the opera house before he arrived. Pobloff believed in discipline; when he reached the stage, he cast a few quick glances about him: fifty-two men in all sat in their accustomed places; his concertmaster, Sven, was nodding at the leader. Then Pobloff surveyed the auditorium, its depths dimly lighted by the few clusters of lights on the platform; white linen coverings made more ghastly the background. He thought he saw someone moving near the main door. "Who's that?" He rapped sharply for an answer but none came. Sven said that the women who cleaned the opera house had not yet arrived. "Lock the doors and keep them out," was the response, and one of the dou-

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ble-bass players ran down the steps to attend to the order. The men smiled, and some whispered that they were evidently in for a hard morning—all signs were ominous. Again the conductor's stick commanded silence.

In a few words he told them he would rehearse his new symphonic poem, "The Abysm:" "I call it by that title as an experiment. In fact the music is experimental—in the development-section I endeavor to represent the depths of starry space; one of those black abysms that are the despair of astronomer and telescope. Ahem!" Pobloff looked so conscious as he wiped his perspiring mop of a forehead that the tenor trombone coughed in his instrument. The strange cackle caused the composer to start: "How's that, what's that?" The man apologized. "Yes, yes, of course you didn't do it on purpose. But how did you do it? Try it again." The trombone blatted and the orchestra roared with laughter. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, this will never do. I needed just such a crazy tone effect and always imagined the trombone too low for it." "Try the oboe, Herr Kapellmeister," suggested Sven, and this was received with noisy signs of joy. "Yes, the crazy oboe, that's the fellow for the crazy effects!"—they all shouted. Luga, at her harp, arpeggiated in sardonic excitement.

"What's the matter with you men this morning?" sternly inquired Pobloff. "Did you miss your breakfasts?" Stillness ensued and the rehearsal proceeded. It was very trying. Seven times the first violins, divided, essayed one passage, and after its chromaticism had been conquered it would not go at all when played with the wood-wind. It was nearly eleven o'clock. The heat increased and also the thirst of the men. As the doors were locked there was no relief. Grumbling started. Pobloff, very pale, his eyes staring out of his head, yelled, swore, stamped his feet, waved his arms and twice barely escaped tumbling over. The work continued and a glaze seemed to obscure his eyes; he was wellnigh speechless but beat time with an intensity that carried his men along like chips in a high surf. The free-fantasia of the poem was reached, and, roaring, the music neared its climacteric point. "Now," whispered Pobloff, stooping, "when the pianissimo begins, I shall watch for the Abysm." As the wind sweepingly rushes to a howling apex so came the propulsive crash of the climax. The tone rapidly subsided and receded; for the composer had so cunningly scored it that groups of instruments were withdrawn without losing the thread of the musical tale. The tone, spun to a needle fineness, rushed up the fingerboard of the fiddles accompanied by the harp in a billowing glissando and —then on ragged rims of wide

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thunder a gust of air seemed to melt lights, men, instruments into a darkness that froze the eyeballs. With a scorching whiff of sulphur and violets, a thin, spiral scream, the music tapered into the sepulchral clang of a tam-tam. And Pobloff, his broad face awash with fear saw by a solitary wavering gas-jet that he was alone and upon his knees. Not a musician was to be seen. Not a sound save dull noises from the street without. He stared about him like a man suffering from some hideous ataxia, and the horror of the affair plucking at his soul, he beat his breast, groaning in an agony of envy.

"Oh, it is the Fourth Dimension they have found—my black abysm! Oh, why did I not fall into it with the ignorant dogs!" He was crying this over and over when the doors were smashed and Pobloff was taken, half delirious, to his home. . . .

The houses of Balak are seldom over two storeys high; an occasional earthquake is the reason for this architectural economy. Pobloff's sleeping apartment opened out upon a broad balcony just above the principal entrance. As he lay upon his couch his thoughts revolved like a coruscating wheel of fire. What! How! Where! And Luga, was she lost to him in that no-man's land of a fourth dimension? He closed his weary wet eyes. Then pricked by a sudden thought he sat up in jealous rage. No-man's land? Yes, but the entire orchestra of fifty -two men were with her—and he hated the horn-player, for had he not intercepted poisonous glances between Luga and that impertinent jackanapes? In his torture Pobloff groaned aloud and wondered how he had reached his home: he could remember nothing after the ebon music had devoured his band. How did it come about? Why was he not drawn within the fatal whirlpool of sound? Or was he outside the fringe of the vortex? As these questions thronged the chambers of his brain, the consciousness of what he had discovered, accomplished, flashed over him in a superior hot wave of exultation. "I am greater than Pythagoras, Kepler, Newton!" he raved, only stopping for breath. Too well had he calculated his trap for the detection of a third dimension in Time, a fourth one in Space, only to catch the wrong game; for he had counted upon studying, if but for a few rapt moments, the vision of a land west of the sun, east of the moon—a novel territory, perhaps a vast playground for souls emancipated from the gyves of existence. But this!—he shuddered at the catastrophe: a very Pompeian calamity depriving him at a stroke of his wife, his orchestra—all, all had been engulfed. Forgetting his newly won crown, forgetting the tremendous import of his discovery to mankind, Pobloff be-

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gan howling, "Luga, Luga, *Akk!* Wife of my bosom, my tender little violet of a harpist!"

His voice floated into the street, and it seemed to him to be echoed by a shrill chorus. Soprano voices reached him and he heard his name mentioned in a foreboding way.

"Where is the pig? Pobloff! Pobloff! Why don't you show your ugly face? Be a man! Where are our husbands?" He recognized a voice—it was the wife of the horn-player who thus insulted him. She was a tall, ugly woman and, as gossip averred, she beat her man if he did not return home sober with all his wages. Pobloff rushed out upon the balcony; it was not many feet above the level of the street. In the rays of a sinking sun he was received with jeers, groans, and imprecations. Balakian women have warm blood in their veins and are not given to measuring their words over-nicely. He stared about him in sheer wonderment. A mob of women gazed up at him and its one expression was unconcealed wrath. Children and men hung about the circle of vengeful amazons laughing, shouting and urging violence. Pobloff, in his dressing-gown, was a fair target. "Where are our husbands? Brute, beast, in what prison have you locked them up? Where is your good woman, Luga? Have you hidden her, you old tyrant?" "No!" shrieked the horn-player's wife, "he's jealous of her." "And she's run away with your man," snapped the wife of the crazy oboist. The two women struggled to get at each other, their fingers curved for hair-plucking, but others interfered—it would not be right to promote a street fight, when the cause of the trouble was almost in their clutches. A disappointed yell arose. Pobloff had sneaked away, overjoyed at the chance, and, as his front door succumbed to angry feminine pressure, he was safely hidden in the opera house which he reached by running along back alleys in the twilight. There he learned from one of the stage hands that the real secret was his and his alone.

Alarmed by the absence of their husbands, the musicians' wives hung around the building pestering the officials. Pobloff has been found, they were informed, in a solitary fit, on the floor of the auditorium. The stage was in the greatest confusion—chairs and music stands being piled about as if a tornado had visited the place. Not a musician was there, and with the missing was Luga, the harp-player. A thousand wild rumors prevailed. The men, tired of tyrannical treatment, brutal rehearsals and continual abuse, had risen in a body and thrashed their leader; then fearing arrest, fled to the suburbs carrying off Luga with them as a dangerous witness. But the summer-garden, where they usually

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foregathered, had not seen them since the Sunday previous—Luga not for weeks. This had been ascertained by interested scouts. The fact that Luga was with the rebels gave rise to disconcerting gossip. Possibly her husband had discovered a certain flirtation—heads shook knowingly. At five o'clock the news spread that Pobloff had by means of a trap in the stage, dropped the entire orchestra into the cellar, where they lay entombed in a half-dying condition. No one could trace this tale to its source, though it was believed to have emanated from the oboe-player's wife. Half a hundred women rushed to the opera house and fell upon their hands and knees, scratching at the iron cellar gratings, and calling loudly through the little windows whose thick panes of glass were grimed with age. Finding nothing, hearing nothing, the dissatisfied crew only needed an angry explosion of bitterness from the lips of the horn-player's spouse to hatch hatred in their bosoms and to set them upon Pobloff at his home.

Now knowing that he was safe for the moment behind the thick walls of the opera house, he consoled himself with some bread and wine which his servant fetched him. And then he fell to thinking hard.

No, not a soul suspected the real reason for the disappearance of the band—that secret was his forever. By the light of a lamp in the property room he danced with joy at his escape from danger, and the tension being relaxed, he burst out sobbing: "Luga! Luga! Oh, where are you, my little harpist! I have not forgotten you, my violet. Let me go to you!" Pobloff rolled over the carpetless floor in an ecstasy of grief, the lamp barely casting enough light to cover his burly figure, his cheeks trilling with tears.

A thin rift of sunshine fell across Pobloff's nose and awoke him. He sat up. It took fully five minutes for self-orientation, and the fixed idea bored vainly at his forehead. He groaned as he realized the hopelessness of the situation. Sometime the truth would have to be told. The king—what would His Majesty not say! Pobloff's life was in danger; he had no doubt on that head. At the best, if he escaped the infuriated women he would be cast into prison, or else wander an exile, all his hopes of glory gone. The prospect was chilling. If he had only kept the score—the score, where was it? In a moment he was on his feet, rummaging the stage for the missing music. It had vanished. Pobloff jumped from the platform to the spot where he had fallen; his sharp eye saw something white beneath the overturned music-stand. It did not take long to reveal the missing *partitur*. All was there, not a leaf missing, though some rumpled and soiled. When Pobloff had tumbled

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into the aisle, miraculously escaping a dislocated neck, the music and the rack had kept him company. Curiously he fingered the manuscript. Yes, there was the fatal spot! He gazed at the strange combination of instruments on the page in his own nervous handwriting. How came the cataclysm? Vainly the composer scanned the various clefs, vainly he strove to endow with significance the sparse bunches of notes scattered over the white ruled paper. He saw the violins in the highest, most screeching position; saw them disappear like a battalion of tiny balloons in a cloud. No, it was not by the viollins the dread enigma was solved. But there were few other instruments on the leaf except the harp. Pooh! The harp was innocent enough with its fantastic spray of arpeggios; it was used only as gilding to warm the bitter, wiry tone of the fiddles. No, it was not the harp, Pobloff decided. The tam-tam, a pulsatile instrument! Perhaps its mordant sound coupled to the hissing of the fiddles, the cheeping of the wood-wind, and the roll of the harp; perhaps—and then he was gripped by a thrilling thought.

He paced the length of the empty hall talking aloud. What an idea! Why not put it into execution at once? But how? Pobloff moaned as he realized its futility. He could secure no other musicians because every one that once resided in Balak had disappeared; there was no hope for their recrudescence. He tramped the parquet like a savage hyena. To play the symphonic poem again, to rescue from eternity his lost Luga, his lost comrades, to hear their extraordinary stories! . . . Trembling seized him. If the work could by any possibility be played again would not the same awful fate overtake the new men and perhaps himself? Decidedly that way would be courting disaster.

As he strode desperately toward the stage, staring at its polished boards as if to extort their secret, he discerned the shining pipes of the monster mechanical organ that Balakian municipal pride had imported and installed there. Pobloff was a man of fertile invention: the organ might serve his purpose. But then came the discouraging knowledge that he could not play it well enough. No matter; he would make the attempt. He clambered over the stage, reached the instrument, threw open the case and inspected the manuals. By pulling out various stops he soon had a fair reproduction of the instrumental effects of his score. Trembling, he placed the music upon the rack, tremblingly he touched the button that set in movement the automatic motor. Forgetting the danger of detection, he set pealing in all its diapasonic majesty this Synthesis of Instruments. He reached the enchanted passage, he played

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it, his knees knocking like an undertaker's hammer, his fingers glued to the keys by moisty fear. The abysm was easily traversed; nothing occurred. Despair crowned the head of Pobloff pressing spikes of remorse into his sweating brow. What could be the reason? Ah, there was no tam-tam! He rushed into the music-room and soon returned with an old, rusty Chinese gong. Again the page was played, the tam-tam's thin edge set shivering with mournful resonance. And again there was no result. Pobloff cursed the organ, cursed the gong, cursed his life, cursed the universe.

The door opened and the stage carpenter peeped in. "Say, Mr. Pobloff, do come and have your coffee! The coast's clear. All the women have gone away to the country on a wild goose chase." His voice was kind though his expression was one of suspicion. Pobloff did seem a trifle mad. He went into the property room. As he drank his coffee the other watched him. Suddenly Pobloff let out a huge cry of satisfaction. "Fool! Dolt! Idiot that I am! Of course the passage will have to be played backward to get them to return, to disenchant the symphony!" He leaped with joy. "Yes, governor, but you've upset your coffee," said the carpenter warningly. Pobloff heard nothing. The problem now was to play that vile passage backward. The organ—there stood the organ but, musician as he was, he could not play his score in reverse fashion. The thing was a manifest impossibility. Then a light beat in upon his tortured brain. The carpenter trembled for the conductor's reason.

"Look here, my boy," Pobloff blurted, "will you do me a favor? Just take this music—these two pages to the organ factory. You know the address. Tell the superintendent it is a matter of life or death to me. Promise him money, opera tickets for the season, for two seasons, if he will have this music reproduced, cut out, perforated, whatever it is—on a roll that I can use in this organ. I must have it within an hour—or soon as he can. Hurry him, stand over him, threaten him, curse him, beat him, give him anything he asks—anything, do you hear?" Thrusting the astonished fellow out of the room into the entry, into the street, Pobloff barred the door and standing on one leg he hopped along the hall like a gay frog, lustily trolling all the while a melancholy Russian folk-song. Then throwing himself prostrate on the floor he spread out his arms cruciform fashion and with a Slavic apathy that was fatalistic awaited the return of the messenger.

The deadly solemnity of the affair had robbed it for him of its strangeness, its abnormality; even his sense of its ludicrousness had

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fled. He was consumed by a desire to see Luga once more. She had been a burden: she was waspish of tongue and given to seeking the admiration of others, notably that of the damnable horn-player—Pobloff clenched his fists—but she was his wife, Luga, and could tell him what he wished most to know. . . .

He seemed to have spent a week, his face pressed to the boards, his eyes concentrated on the uneven progress of a file of ants in a crack. The cautious tap at the stage door had not ceased before he was there seizing in a clutch of iron the carpenter. "The rolls! Have you got them with you?" he gasped. A cylinder was shoved into his eager hand and with it he fled to the auditorium, not even shutting the doors behind him. What did he care now? He was sure of victory. Placing the roll in reverse order in the cylinder he started the mechanism of the organ. Slowly, as if the grave were unwilling to give up its prey the music began to whimper, wheeze and squeak. It was sounding backward and it sounded three times before the unhappy man saw failure once more blinking at him mockingly. But he was not to be denied. He re-read the score, set it going on the organ, then picked up the tam-tam. "These old Chinese ghosts caused the trouble once and they can cause it again," he muttered. He struck the instrument softly, and the music for the fourth time went on its way quivering, its rear entering the world first. . . .

The terrified carpenter, in relating the affair later swore that the darkness was black as the wings of Satan. A lightning flash had ended the music; then he heard feet pausing in the gloom, and from his position in the doorway he saw the stage crowded with men, the musicians of the Balakian orchestra, all scraping, blaring and pounding away at the symphony, Pobloff, stick in hand, beating time, his eyes closed in bliss, his back arched like a cat's.

When they had finished playing, Pobloff wiped his forehead and said, "Thank you, gentlemen. That will do for to-day." They immediately began to gabble, hastily putting away their instruments; while from without entered a crazy stream of women weeping, laughing, and scolding. In five minutes the hall was emptied of them all. Pobloff turned to Luga. She eyed him demurely, as she covered with historic green baize her brave harp.

"Well," she said, joining him, "well! Give an account of yourself, sir!" Pobloff watched her, completely stupefied. Only his discipline, his routine had carried him through this tremendous resurrection: he had beaten time from a sense of duty—why he

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found himself at the head of his band he understood not. He only knew that the experiment of playing the enchanted symphony backward was a success: that it had become disenchanted; that Luga, his violet, his harpist, his wife was restored to him to bring him the wonderful tidings. He put his arms around her. She drew back in her primmest attitude.

"No, not yet, Pobloff. Not until you tell me where you have been all day." He sat down and wept, and then the situation poking him in the risible rib, he laughed until Luga herself relaxed.

"It may be very funny to you, husband, and no doubt you've had a jolly time, but you've not told where or with whom." Pobloff seized her by the wrists.

"Where were *you*? What have you been doing, woman? What was it like, that strange country which you visited, and from which you are so marvellously returned to me like a stone upcast by a crater?" She lifted her eyebrows in astonishment.

"You know, Pobloff, I have warned you about your tendency to apoplexy. You bother your brain, such as it is, too much with figures. When you fell off the stage this morning I was sure you were killed, and we were all very much alarmed. But after the hornist told us you would be all right in a few hours, we—" "Whom do you mean by *we*, Luga?" "The men, of course." "And you saw me faint?" "Certainly, Pobloff."

"Where did you go, wife?" "Go? Nowhere. We remained here. Besides, the doors were locked, and the men couldn't get away." "And you saw nothing strange, did not notice that you were out of my sight, out of the town's sight, for over thirty hours?" "Pobloff," she vixenishly declared, "you've been at the vodka."

"And so there is no true perception of time in the fourth dimension of space," he sadly reflected. His brows became dark with jealousy: "What did you do all the time?" That accursed horn-player in her company for over a day!

"Do?" "Yes," he repeated, "do? Were there no wonderful sights? Didn't you catch a glimpse, as through an open door, of rare planetary vistas, of a remoter plane of existence? Were there no grandiose and untrodden stars? O Luga, tell me!—you are a woman of imagination—what did you see, hear, feel in that many-colored land, out of time, out of space?"

"See?" she echoed irritably, "what could I see in this hall? When the men weren't grumbling at having nothing to drink, they were playing *pinochle*."

"They played cards in the fourth dimension of space!" Pobloff boomed out reproachfully, sorrowfully. Then he went meekly to his home with Luga, the harpist.

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"I was born and raised in the Middle West," says Bob Leman, "was graduated from a Big Ten university, and served in the army for four years in World War II. After the war I went to work for one of the enormous corporations, which I left after a good many years to initiate an enterprise of my own. I am married and have two daughters in high school." Mr. Leman's first story for us concerns a door to door salesman with an out-of-this-world sales pitch and one of the most ingenious closings we have ever witnessed.

BAIT

by Bob Leman

IT WAS THE LAST HOUSE AT THE end of the street, a fine old Georgian mansion built on a couple of acres of well-barbered lawn. Even under the lash of a bitter February rain it had an air of warmth and comfort. The light from its windows came softly to me through the leaden dusk as I trudged up the driveway. Water was squishing in my shoes.

The knocker was a great brass eagle which held the clapper in its beak. I gave it a genteel thump. I'd had to push myself to make this last call. My clothes were sodden and my feet were as tired as they were wet. I was very cold. But I had a schedule, and nothing was going to make me deviate from it. Street by street, house by house, I was covering the city. If I let myself fall behind schedule just once, I could only fall further and further behind. Thank God, though, this was the last of the day.

I heard the knob turn, and I fixed the selling smile on my face. The door opened about eight inches. A woman's voice said, "Yes?"

"Good afternoon," I said. "I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes about the length of your life."

The door opened a little wider. "What are you selling, young man?"

"Long life, ma'am," I said. "Long life."

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I could see her plainly now. She was a most distinguished old lady, a real *grande dame*. Her snowy hair was meticulously arranged in a vaguely old-fashioned way, and at her throat gleamed an enormous diamond on a gold chain. Her face was lined and rather stern, her manner and voice poised and cultivated. I was acutely aware of my wet, seedy clothes and the five o'clock shadow on my face.

She peered at me. "Long life? No, what is it you're selling?"

A gust of wind drove a slant of freezing rain against my back and in through the open doorway. She said, "Well, you'd better come in before we both freeze." I sloshed into the entrance hall, and she closed the door.

She looked me over in an unobtrusive way as I stood and dripped on her carpet. She had seen my satchel first thing, of course, and now she said, looking at it, "Health foods?"

"I'm not selling health foods, Mrs.—uh—."

"Moswell," she supplied.

"I'm not selling health foods, Mrs. Moswell, but what I have to say does concern food. If you will give me just a few moments of your time, I'll show you something that may change your whole life."

"Books, then."

She was ruining my whole pitch. I *was* selling books, of course, but it was too early to mention it. It's always better to have their interest running high before showing the book. There are more people than you'd think who shy away at the sight of a book.

"Mrs. Moswell," I said, "what I'm going to tell you may seem incredible at first, but I hope you'll hear me out. I'm very serious when I say that this could be the most important day of your life."

She smiled faintly. "No doubt, no doubt," she said. She glanced at her watch. "May I ask your name, young man?"

"Smeed, Mrs. Moswell. Ripley Smeed."

"Mr. Smeed, if you'll just hang your coat over there, I'll be glad to hear why this is such an important day."

I followed her into the living room. I felt as out of place as a horse in a library. It was a long, long room, richly carpeted, hung with dark oil paintings of bearded and side-whiskered Victorian gentlemen. At the opposite end logs blazed in a marble fireplace. Lamps shed soft light on graceful, gleaming furniture. It was a beautiful room, almost impossibly rich and warm in comparison with the vile evening outside.

She seated me near the fireplace. The warmth reached out and embraced me as I settled into the great soft chair. There was a tea tray on a low table. Mrs. Moswell said, "Will you have a cup of tea? I was just about to take mine."

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"Thank you," I said, "I'd like one very much." I hoped I hadn't sounded too surprised. To be offered tea in a porcelain cup from a heavy silver service is not a common experience for book peddlers.

"Milk or lemon?" she asked.

"M-milk please," I said. My teeth were chattering slightly as the fire began to soak the cold out of my bones. She gave me a close look and said, "Oh no. You're cold. You'd better have some of this in your tea." She took a decanter from a painted cabinet and poured a tot into my cup. It was a heavy, dark rum, smooth as rain water, and in the hot tea it sent soft explosions of warmth all the way to my fingertips.

She sat with patrician erectness, her teacup delicately balanced. "Now, Mr. Smeed," she said. "Tell me what you have to sell."

"Mrs. Moswell," I said earnestly, leaning forward, "people don't have to grow old. There is absolutely no reason for anyone to suffer the incapacities and discomforts of old age. The hardened artery, the weak kidney, the tired heart—these need not be. Arthritis comes to the bone, dyspepsia to the stomach, sluggishness to the liver, all unnecessarily. The young have the raven hair, the clear eye, the fresh skin, while the old are grey and rheumy and wrinkled. This need not be so. Old age has been conquered!"

She gave me a quizzical, half-smiling look. "I'm afraid, Mr. Smeed, that you've come to me a little too late. I already have most of those afflictions," she said.

"Ah, but with this method they can be made right—damaged organs made whole, tired ones brisk."

"Mr. Smeed, that's ridiculous."

"No, ma'am, it isn't at all. Aging, you see, occurs in the individual cells of the body, not in the organism as a whole. When the cells age—and when, in their reproduction by fission, the resultant pair of cells is less viable than the original cell—then deterioration of the parts and organs of the body takes place. We call this aging.

"Now a method has been found to refresh and rejuvenate the cells of the body. It is an exceedingly easy and convenient method, and can be followed by anyone. When the individual cells remain vigorous, then aging cannot take place. And I am here today, Mrs. Moswell, to make this method available to you."

I was well into my spiel now, rattling along at a great rate, putting real feeling into the invented sales talk. The rum had oiled my tongue very satisfactorily. My cup was empty, and without asking me if I wanted it, Mrs. Moswell poured again and added rum. She said, "And what *is* your method, Mr. Smeed?"

"Diet, Mrs. Moswell," I said

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oracularly. "Or rather, an addition to the diet." I sipped tea-and-rum. "It has been learned that certain common substances, taken as a supplement to one's ordinary diet, will arrest—and, indeed, reverse—the phenomenon known as aging. You will understand that I am not speaking of so-called 'health foods'—desiccated liver, bone meal and the like—but rather of ordinary substances found in every household. These substances, taken in proper quantities, combine with the protein molecules in ordinary foodstuffs to form something called *provin*. Provin rejuvenates the cells of the body. In effect, it makes you young again.

"Now this book, Mrs. Moswell, is actually a cookbook, a recipe book." I handed it to her. "Let me show you how simple it all is. On page twenty-two is a recipe for an omelette. Will you read it please?" The book isn't much to look at. The binding is pretty sleazy, the paper is just this side of pulp, and the printing is obviously cheap. But even so, it had taken all my money to have three thousand copies printed and bound.

Mrs. Moswell looked up from the book. She raised her brows and said, "Iodine? Cream of tartar? In an omelette?"

I ventured another swallow from my cup. "You will notice, Mrs. Moswell, that the amounts used are very tiny indeed. The recipes call for the additions only in homeopathic doses. You will find, for example, that this omelette recipe notes that sufficient iodine will be added if iodized salt is used as a seasoning. Nonetheless, these exiguous helpings of iodine and cream of tartar will, in the egg mixture, and at the temperature necessary to cook an omelette, cause a minute quantity of provin to be formed. It will be a quantity sufficient to activate the cells of the body for about a month. If every month you eat a dish prepared from one of these recipes, permanent youth is yours."

"Now, really, Mr. Smeed, you can't be serious."

"Mrs. Moswell, will you please look at this?"

I handed her the birth certificate. It was frayed and dirty from much handling, but it legibly certified that Ripley Smeed had been born in Bagby County, Nebraska, on August 14, 1898. I said, "It's *my* birth certificate, Mrs. Moswell."

"But that would make you—mmm—sixty-eight years old."

"That's right."

She laughed, genuinely amused, and I found myself liking her very much. She said, "*Twenty*-eight would be about right, I think." She was shrewd, that much was certain. I'd have to proceed carefully with her.

I said urgently, "Mrs. Moswell,

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please believe me. What I am telling you is absolutely true. I am sixty-eight years old. Provin has made me young. It can make *you* young!" I hoped I wasn't overdoing the emotion. I was aware of being a little drunk. "Four years ago, Mrs. Moswell," I said, "you wouldn't have doubted my age. I was sixty-four and looked every day of it. My arteries were hard and my heart wheezed like a leaky kettle. I had only six of my own teeth left and there was nothing but skin on the top of my head. Just four years ago.

"That was when I began to add a touch of cream of tartar and a hint of iodine to my omelettes, a droplet of soya sauce and a squirt of a certain brand of hair tonic to my meat loaf. And for each year I have been on the diet, my apparent age has decreased by a decade. I look and feel like a man of thirty. And anyone can do the same thing. *You* can, Mrs. Moswell."

She didn't quite laugh. "And how did you happen to discover this miraculous substance, Mr. Smeed?"

"Well, you see we knew in advance of the existence of provin, and we worked by trial and error —worked for a long time—to see if it could be 'manufactured' by us."

She refilled my cup before speaking again. She reminded me of Miss Beiderbeck, my ninth-grade English teacher. She said, "You say 'we,' Mr. Smeed. Do you have associates?"

Easy now, I told myself. *Tread carefully here. This has to be done just right.* Aloud I said, "Just my wife. Actually she's the one who made the tests, who learned how to get provin into our food. My only contribution has been to spread the word as well as I can —and I haven't done too well at it. Publicity is expensive. What I'm hoping for is to prove my claim to someone with enough money to finance a program to give this information to the whole world."

"No doubt. But just how did your wife happen to know about this 'provin,' Mr. Smeed, so that she was moved to make her tests?"

I took a deep breath before I replied. We were near the point where she might decide that I was a dangerous lunatic. I said, "She'd lived all her life on food containing provin. Then suddenly she found herself without it. She knew she would begin to age unless a means of obtaining it could be found, and she began to experiment. It took years. By the time she found it we were married, and I was able to benefit because I ate what she did. You see the results."

Mrs. Moswell's expression was hard to read. "She had lived all her life on food containing provin, you say. May I take it then that she has lived a long life?"

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"She has."

"How old is she, Mr. Smeed?"

Now. This was where the balance tipped. "Four hundred and eighteen years old, Mrs. Moswell," I said.

She drank tea and stared soberly at me. I felt reasonably certain that I had handled her right, that she would feel compelled to question me further, but it was still possible that she would only laugh and ask me to leave. Then she spoke, and I felt shaky with relief. She asked, "But if your wife was brought up on this magic substance, it must have been given her by her parents. That might mean that they're still alive and even older than she is, mightn't it?"

"It's very likely."

"Where are they, then? Why hasn't anybody heard about this long-lived family?"

"Mrs. Moswell," I said firmly, "I'm selling this book for two dollars. By buying a copy and using it you can easily prove or disprove what I'm saying. Why not buy a copy? Then I won't have to take any more of your time."

"Oh, no, Mr. Smeed," she said, just as firmly. "I'm quite interested in hearing about this. Now tell me, where do your wife's parents live? In some mysterious and inacessible place? Tibet or Antarctica?"

She was baiting me, much as she might have baited a grandson who evinced an irrational affection for the Beatles. I said, as seriously as possible, "Mrs. Moswell, if you have the time to listen, I'll be glad to tell you what I know about it. And if it's hard to believe, keep in mind how little we know about our universe. Remember how many important increases in human knowledge were almost lost because hidebound men and institutions refused to accept new concepts. Imagine how many discoveries are lost, perhaps forever, because the discoverer could not get a hearing. Suppose there had not been a Galileo to prove the theory of Copernicus, or that Copernicus had not left a record of his idea. Well, you asked about my wife's origins. Please hear me out.

"I want you to visualize the world as it might have been if provin had been a part of man's existence since the beginning of man. I want you to accept the idea that at some time far in the past provin became a part of the world. It may have dropped upon the earth in a meteorite, or swished through the atmosphere in a comet's tail, or simply have been a part of the creation. However, it came about, provin is there. It is in every green thing that grows, and in the herbivores who eat the greenery and in the flesh-eaters who eat them. Fish, flesh, fowl, insect, microbe—all have their trace of provin.

"Where provin exists, life is long. Each creature has developed through the ages in such a way that

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it need not produce so many young as to feed dangerously off other life. You will find cockroaches doing their scavenging, but they do not flood the world with cockroaches; the sourdocks grow between the corn rows and absorb nourishment from the soil, but there are not so many sourdocks that they starve the corn; the weasel kills the rabbit and sucks the egg, but there are not too many weasels. Nature strikes its balance.

"Now in that world of sparse population there developed, as you might imagine, a society that is wholly rigid and stratified, somewhat like the society of Egypt five thousand years ago, if Egypt had enjoyed what we call 'progress.' Of course in the provin world it began much longer ago than five thousand years, and they didn't have our problems of breeding and food.

"Society in the provin world is scientifically advanced and totally controlled. It is like a single family, most of whose members are clever and inventive, but all of whom are totally committed to the father's principles, which are so ancient and fixed that they have become simple, necessary conditions of life. Deviation from the mores of the family is probably an act of insanity, and is most certainly criminal.

"Let us imagine that such a criminal exists in the provin world. And let us suppose that all the knowledge accumulated in ten centuries of the life of a gifted mathematician has been used to create a doorway to a parallel world, but a parallel world without provin. Suppose further that an explorer is sent to the parallel world, and that this explorer is the black sheep, the individualist, and that the parallel world is our earth.

"Do you see, Mrs. Moswell? This explorer from a world that is wholly and rigidly controlled comes to our earth and becomes enamoured of our slipshod, easy-going manner, our clogged, teeming populace, and our contumacious and contrary ways. In the mind of this explorer awaken the ideas of freedom and individuality, concepts which have no words in the provin world. And she likes it so well that she decides to stay here.

"She is now, in provin world thinking, an insane criminal. She must be brought back and cured of her aberration. The hunters are sent, and the explorer becomes a quarry. She hides, living in poverty, hunted and frightened, always conscious of pursuit. She evades them for a great many years, but she is in a world without provin, and without provin she must age and die. She begins her experiments. These are successful eventually, and she has her provin. She can, at long last, settle down to a long and happy life.

"But she has, perhaps unfortu-

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nately, acquired a husband. The man is an impractical idealist, convinced that it is his duty to give provin to the world. And he works to spread the word, instead of sensibly settling down to use his limitless span of years to arrange a comfortable life. The poor fool hasn't been too successful at it, but he's making an honest effort to give mankind something good that it hasn't had before."

The last sentence came out very loud, and seemed to be echoing between the rows of ancestral portraits. Mrs. Moswell had shrunk into her chair, as if frightened by my violence, and her eyes never left me. It was clearly time to wrap it up. I took the book off the coffee table.

She said in a small voice, "Mr. Smeed, I'll buy one of your books. Did you say two dollars?"

Hooked, by God! Now for the gaff. I cleared my throat and said, "Mrs. Moswell, the book is a fake. I've been lying to you. There's no way to get provin here. It has to come from its own world. The book is a sort of confidence game." That was the speech to finish it. I stood and turned toward the door to make a dignified exit. I spoiled it by stumbling. I don't usually drink very much.

"Don't go, Ripley," she said. "There's something else I'd like to ask you about. Would you stay a few minutes longer?"

"Of course, Mrs. Moswell."

"Ripley, you puzzle me. Do you believe in your provin or don't you? You sounded quite sincere a moment ago."

"Oh, I believe in it. In fact, I know it exists. I know because I used to be old and now I'm young. But I won't swindle you by selling you the book. Provin can't be made here. The only way to get it is to eat food from the provin world. Food concentrates provin. Meat especially. A little slice of beef from one of their animals is worth decades of life.

"But the book is simply a pack of nonsense. Odd additions to your breakfast are not going to increase your lifespan. I dreamed up the book after Mirva began to feed me on provin-world supplies. I've always made my living by minor swindling. For thirty years I sold astrology books and health foods and patent medicines, and when I found a real miracle, I based a little confidence game on it, hoping to make money. It's been a total failure. But provin does exist. Nobody knows that better than Mirva and I do. If I were back in the carnival and had a platform, I'd show you an authentic four-hundred year old woman. But it takes real provin to produce one." Once again I headed, a little unsteadily, for the door.

A strange voice behind me said coldly, "Stop, Mr. Smeed!" I spun around.

Mrs. Moswell was pointing a

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gun at my belly. She had changed. She still had the Queen Mary dress and hair, but the woman was different. This was not an old lady, but a strong young woman. The lines were gone from the face, and the unsteady movements of old age were replaced by a lithe suppleness. A superb actress was revealing her natural self. Her pose left no doubt that she would use the gun if she saw the need. I tried to say something, but only a strangled noise came out.

"Smeed," she said in the new, cold voice, "did Mirva really believe she wouldn't be caught and brought home? She never had a chance, of course. I've been hunting her for quite a long time, and I'd have found her in any case, but it's like her to have made it easy for me by selecting a threadbare petty thief to share her life in this anthill. Your greed for a few dollars has led me to her more quickly than I'd hoped—and by accident. She really is crazy, you know. Crazy enough to fit into this crawling dungheap of yours. She must be taken back and made an example of."

The words were from a bad melodrama, but the gun was very real and present. She twitched it, not enough to spoil her aim if she saw a need to shoot, but enough to underline her words as she said, "All right, Smeed, we'll take my car to wherever Mirva is waiting for you. You can drive, can't you?"

I swallowed and said that I could.

"Yes. You will drive carefully, and you will remember that this gun is pointed at you. Let us go."

We went. She sat silently beside me as the big car hissed along the wet streets. I was still stunned, partly because of the rum, but mainly because of the situation in which I found myself. The woman was overpowering. Her cold arrogance, her confident assumption of superiority, and the sheer weight of her personality seemed to have reduced me to a worm. I drove along the quiet streets to our apartment without even attempting to confuse the route or stall for time. I was docile as a lamb, driving carefully, trying to organize my thoughts and never quite succeeding.

We whispered to a stop in front of the apartment house. I methodically switched off, set the brake, and removed the key. The whole thing seemed unreal, hallucinatory. I was almost able to watch myself from the outside.

"Which apartment?" she asked. It was the first time she had spoken since we had left her house.

"Ick," I said. I hawked and tried again. "Second floor." It was still a squeak.

I climbed the stairs numbly, lifting my feet and setting them down as though they were made of pottery. She now had the gun pointed at the small of my back.

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When we came to the door of the apartment, I couldn't ring the bell. My finger stopped about three inches away and hung there shaking. She reached around me and pushed the button. I heard the bell, and then I heard Mirva's footsteps.

I wanted to make some kind of a noise. I couldn't. And then there was Mirva's voice, from behind the door: "Who is it?"

My voice came back. "It's me, dearest youngster." I waited.

The key turned and the door swung open. Mrs. Moswell's hand swept back and pushed me helplessly across the hall. Then she charged in through the doorway, while I staggered about, trying to regain my balance. Just as I recovered and plunged toward the door, I heard a crunching blow, and as I burst through, I saw Mrs. Moswell, her head a red ruin, collapse to the floor.

And then Mirva was in my arms, shaking and sobbing, but short of hysteria. The baseball bat was still in her hand. It was red and wet around the trademark.

"It's a woman," she said. She made a noise like a hiccup. "I thought they'd send a man. When I heard you give the code I thought it would be a man." She was shivering.

"Easy," I said. "Easy, baby. It's over now. We've waited a long time, but it's all over. We have it. Look. There it is."

Mirva's breathing slowed. "There it is," she repeated. We looked at the body of Mrs. Moswell. We stood there for a long time.

"Well," she said briskly after a while, "we'd better get busy, hadn't we? We have quite a lot to do. Why don't you get rid of the car while I go to work here?"

I brushed a strand of white hair from her cheek and kissed her. I said, jubilantly, "I'll be back in twenty minutes. Sit down and have a drink while I'm gone. There's no hurry now." She smiled.

I left the car in an alley a dozen blocks away and walked home with a springy step. We were in the clear. I hadn't forgotten to pick up the satchel, and the copy of the book I had shown to Mrs. Moswell was safe in my pocket. I pulled it out and hefted it affectionately. The rain slicked its cover, and a streetlight picked out the cheap gold print of the title: *Eat Your Way to Longer Life.*

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THE KNIGHT-ERRANT, THE DRAGON, AND THE MAIDEN

by Gahan Wilson

ONCE UPON A TIME, A BOLD knight-errant, dressed in shining armor and riding a magnificent white charger, came across a huge dragon lurking in a dismal mountain pass. The dragon had thick, copper scales and breathed bright blue fire from its nostrils and mouth.

Now the knight knew that the principal occupation of dragons was that of guarding young maidens, so he swiveled his helmet this way and that until, sure enough, he saw one. The cruel dragon had bound her to the rocky side of the pass with heavy iron chains.

The knight took a long, thoughtful look at the maiden, observing, among other things, how poorly her white gown served to cover the sinuous curves of her body. He decided that she would do very well and, accordingly, unsheathed his sword, dismounted from his charger, and strode forth to do battle with the dragon.

Although the dragon had several tons on the knight, and at least four yards' advantage in reach, he had neglected his exercises of late, and overindulged in mead. The result was that he had gotten badly out of shape. The knight, on the other hand, was in the pink of condition, and had only recently graduated from a school where

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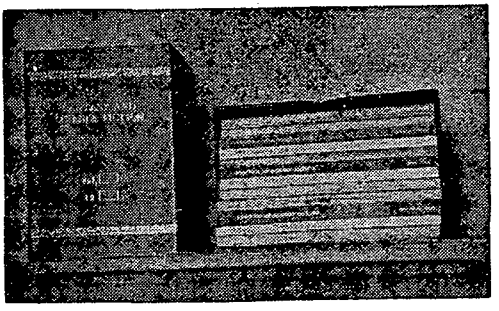
he had learnt all the very latest techniques in monster vanquishment.

The battle was, therefore, sadly one-sided from the start, and in an embarrassingly short time the knight stood with one of his feet on the dragon's neck and his sword raised and ready to deliver the final, irrevocable, chop.

But before he could begin his blade's downward swing, the maiden snuck up behind the unsuspecting knight and, with one looping blow from her heavy iron manacles, caved in both his helmet and his skull. She then turned and cast a reproachful look at her reptile guardian, which was still sprawled ignominiously on the ground.

"If you can't do any better than that, Poopsie," she told it, "I'm going to get me another dragon."

Moral: *Free willing prisoners at your own risk.*



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SCIENCE

RIGHT BENEATH YOUR FEET

by Isaac Asimov

I AM INORDINATELY FOND OF THE name Isaac. Partly, this is because it happens to belong to me, but mostly it is because it is rather uncommon as first names go. This means I am not plagued, ordinarily, by other Isaacs. When someone says "Isaac" they generally mean me, and I answer if I am within earshot.

Of course, there was Isaac Newton, but, as anyone who follows these monthly essays knows, I am a great admirer of his, and, besides, he is long since dead. I am more than a little discomfited, however, at the current popularity of Isaac Bashevis Singer, who is not only a living Isaac, but who is also a writer.

Yet such Isaacs at least reflect credit on the name. What about those who, for one reason or another, do not?

It was in this connection that I received a recent shock. Having been busily engaged in sopping up information from an encyclopedia, in connection with some little job or other, my eye happened to fall upon the entry CANTON (Illinois). There, under the sub-heading "History," it said in letters of clearest print:

"The town was founded in 1825 by Isaac Swan . . . The founder . . . named his town Canton in the belief that Canton, China, was directly opposite on the globe."

How embarrassing for an Isaac to think this. It is possible to know at once, without looking at a map or globe, that Canton, China, is not on the side of the globe directly opposite to Canton, Illinois. In fact, we can go farther and say that no point in China is on the side of the globe directly opposite any point in the United States. Let us go far-

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ther still and say that no point anywhere in Europe or Asia is directly opposite any point in North America.

But by now you have guessed that Isaac Swan's mistake hasn't embarrassed me to the point where I am unable to write an article on the subject. And in fact I intend to do so, and right now, too!

The Greeks were the first to have worked out the fact that the Earth was spherical in shape, and they were the first, therefore, to worry about what the other side of the planet might be like.

Perhaps at first there was some feeling among the Greeks that they themselves lived on top of the Earth (their eyes told them that much) and that any person attempting to live on the other side would fall off. Youngsters today, on first learning that the Earth is shaped like a ball, probably have that same initial worry.

By Aristotle's time, however, it was plain that "up" and "down" were relative terms, that all matter on Earth tended to the center, and that "down" was therefore in the direction of one's feet wherever one stood upon the planet. The other side of the Earth could therefore well be inhabited.

Nevertheless, even if men did not fall off the other side of the Earth, there was no question but that relative to one's self, those on the other side were upside down. If you could see right through the Earth, you would observe the feet of men on the other side pointing "upward" toward you.

Whether you considered those feet as being located on the opposite side of the globe, or as pointing in the direction opposite to that in which yours were pointing, the term to use for them would, in either case, be "antipodes." This is from Greek words meaning "opposite-feet."

Many of the ancient and medieval geographers, knowing that it grew generally hotter as one travelled south, surmised that the equatorial belt on Earth was uninhabitable and unpassable because of its blazing heat. If this were so, the Earth would be divided into two halves that would be forced to remain forever out of touch.

The temperate regions north of the Equator were known to be inhabited, of course. The temperate regions south of the Equator might be inhabited, too, but before 1400 European geographers could not tell. They could only try to work it out by deduction from first principles or, if they preferred, from the inspired words of the Bible. The unknown and unknowable half of the Earth was sometimes referred to, broadly, as the antipodes and it can be used, even today, to refer to the southern hemisphere.

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Such a broad meaning of the term, however, has been rendered useless by the 15th Century discovery that the equator could, after all, be crossed.* Let us therefore restrict the word to its narrow meaning.

In the narrow sense, one ought to speak of an antipodal point; that is, that point which is directly opposite to the point on which you are standing. If you were to dig a hole straight down, you would (if you could) reach the center of the Earth and, continuing, eventually come into the open again at the antipodal point, having dug through nearly 8,000 miles of rock and molten metal.

Or suppose we confine ourselves to the surface of the Earth and pretend that surface is absolutely smooth, ideally spherical and exactly 25,000 miles in circumference. (All of these pretenses are actually quite reasonable approximations of the truth.) In that case, if we travelled 12,500 miles in *any* direction, we would end up at the same point—the antipodal point.

Next step: What can we tell about the antipodal point without looking at a map?

Let's begin by considering latitude (see GHOST LINES IN THE SKY, *F & SF*, May 1964). Suppose you are standing at a point which is at a latitude of $x°$ N. In order to reach the antipodal point you would have to drop an imaginary line through the center of the earth.

When that line reaches the center, it is at a latitude of 0°† for the center of the earth is in the equatorial plane. (To see this, imagine yourself to be slicing the earth across the various parallels of latitude. Only the slice along the equator, at a latitude of 0°, would cut through the center. If your imagination fails you, look at a globe.)

Well, then, if the latitude of the imaginary line has dropped from $x°$ N to 0° in passing from your position to the center of the earth, and thus completing half its journey; it should, in the remaining half of its journey, by a simple consideration of the symmetry of the situation, pass from 0° to $x°$ S.

We conclude, then, that for any point at a latitude of $x°$ N, the antipodal point must be at a latitude of $x°$ S. Contrariwise, from any point at a latitude of $x°$ S, the antipodal point is at a latitude of $x°$ N.

**It is a matter of pure chauvinism, by the way, to call this a 15th Century discovery. Europeans may have discovered it then, but non-Europeans in South America, Africa, Indonesia, and Australia had crossed the equator thousands of years earlier.*

†The 0° latitude marks the line of the equator. This divides the northern hemisphere from the southern, and is not itself either north or south latitude, and should therefore be marked neither N nor S, but simply 0°.

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This gives us enough information for several interesting conclusions.

1) For any point at 90° N, the antipodal point is at 90° S and vice versa. But there is only one point on earth that is at 90° N and only one at 90° S, the North Pole and South Pole respectively. The North Pole and South Pole are therefore antipodal to each other.

2) For any point at a latitude of 0°, the antipodal point must also be at a latitude of 0°. Therefore, for any point on the equator, the antipodal point is also on the equator.

3) For any point in the northern hemisphere, the antipodal point must be in the southern hemisphere, and vice versa. Therefore, if two points are both in the northern hemisphere (or both in the southern hemisphere) they cannot be antipodal to each other, and you can reach that conclusion without consulting any map or globe. Since all of Europe, Asia and North America are in the northern hemisphere, no point in any portion of these continents can be antipodal to any other point. In particular Canton, China, cannot be antipodal to Canton, Illinois, and so much for Isaac Swan.

Let's consider longitude, next. By arguments similar to those for latitude, we can conclude that any point in the eastern hemisphere must have an antipodal point in the western hemisphere and vice versa. If two points are both in the eastern hemisphere or both in the western hemisphere, one cannot possibly be antipodal to the other.

But let's go farther. Each meridian is a "great circle," passing through both north and south poles. (A great circle is a circle, drawn on the surface of a sphere, and lying on a plane passing through the center of the sphere and cutting the sphere in two equal parts. Thus, a plane slicing through any meridian will pass through the center of the earth and will cut the north into two equal halves.)

If you start at some point on a particular meridian, and draw an imaginary line straight downward, it will pass through the center of the earth and then out to the surface of the earth on another point on the same meridian. This is true for *any* great circle, and not just for meridians. It is true for the equator, as I pointed out earlier, the equator being the only parallel of latitude that is a great circle.

The catch about meridians of longitude, however, is that they do not bear the same label all the way around the earth. Each of them is divided into two halves with different labels. Thus, if the 0° meridian is followed past the north or south pole, it becomes the 180° meridian.*

**The 0°/180° meridian divides the earth into an eastern and western half. The meridian is not iself either East Longitude or West Longitude, and is written simply 0° or 180° without an appended E or W.*

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If the 10° E meridian is followed past the north or south poles it becomes the 170° W meridian. If the 50° W meridian is followed past the north or south pole it becomes the 130° E meridian.

In general, a meridian marked $y°$ E becomes $(180 - y)°$ W, and one marked $y°$ W becomes $(180 - y)°$ E, when these are followed beyond the poles. If a point is located on any particular meridian, its antipodal point is located on the other half of that particular meridian.

We can summarize then by saying that if a point on the earth's surface has a location of $x°$ N, $y°$ W, its antipodal point has a location of $x°$ S, $(180 - y)°$ E. This system holds for any combination of N or S and E or W, provided we remember to replace N by S (and vice versa) and W by E (and vice versa) in passing from point to antipodal point.

Now let's go back to Canton, Illinois, the town founded by Isaac Swan. It is located at just about 40.6° N, 90° W. Its antipodal point must therefore be 40.6° S, 90° E. (The 90° meridian is the only one that doesn't change its number on passing the poles, since $180 - 90 = 90$, but it does change from W to E and vice versa.)

The point antipodal to Canton, Illinois, lies in the Indian Ocean, about 1600 miles southwest of Perth, Australia, the nearest bit of continental land. And it is about 4600 miles from Canton, China.

In fact, suppose we work out a patch of the Earth's surface that is antipodal to the forty-eight contiguous states of the United States. The United States stretches, roughly speaking from 50° N to 30° N and from 70° W to 125° W.

The antipodal patch, then, would be from 50° S to 30° S and from 110° E to 55° E, *and that entire area is ocean.* In other words, if you dig straight down from any point in the forty-eight states, you are almost certain to emerge in the watery wastes of the southern Indian ocean.

In this whole watery stretch, the largest piece of dry land is Kerguelen Island, named for the French navigator, Kerguelen-Tremarec, who discovered it in 1772. It is an unattractive island (its alternate name is Desolation Island), owned by France, and located about 1400 miles north of the coast of Antarctica. It has an area of 1300 square miles, making it about one-third larger than the state of Rhode Island. Its location is 40° S, 70° E, so that its antipodal point is 40° N, 110° W.

This means that there is a Rhode Island-sized patch of land, where the boundary of Montana meets with the junction of the Canadian

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provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, which has the dignity of being the only region in North America where one can dig straight down and come through upon a sizable piece of dry real-estate. The American town nearest the place is Kremlin, Montana, and the nearest Canadian town is Jaydot, Alberta.

The only other patches of land I can find in the antipodal section of the Indian Ocean are two small islands, Amsterdam Island and St. Paul Island, both also French possessions. Amsterdam is 25 square miles in area, a trifle larger than Manhattan Island, while St. Paul is only 3 square miles in area. The former is at 38° S, 77° E, while the latter is 38.7° S, 77.5° E. The antipodal points to those islands are, respectively, 38° N, 103° E, and 38.7° N, 102.5° W.

The points antipodal to those two islands are both in east central Colorado. If anyone happens to be about 7 miles southeast of Las Animas, Colorado, and digs straight down, he will emerge on Amsterdam Island. If he is about the same distance southeast of Karval, Colorado, he will emerge on St. Paul Island.

I suspect the two towns are unaware of these distinctions.

What about Alaska and Hawaii, however?

The antipodal patch for the bulk of Alaska lies roughly between a latitude of 60° S and 70° S and a longitude of 12° E and 40° E. This patch is to be found in the ocean south of Africa and covers no land of consequence. It skims the coastline of Antarctica without significant contact.

For that matter, the antipodal patch for Canada lies between those for Alaska and the United States and is also in the south Indian Ocean. The archipelago north of Canada has as its antipodal regions, various portions of the continent of Antarctica. For instance, the antipodes of Victoria Island off north-central Canada lies along the Ingrid Christensen Coast and the Merv Ice Shelf in Antarctica.

Other arctic land areas also have sections of the coast of Antarctica as antipodes. The antipodes of northern Greenland lies in Victoria Land and along the coast of the Ross Ice Shelf. The Tamyr peninsula in north-central Siberia, has, as its antipodes, portions of the Palmer Peninsula (a name recently changed to the Antarctic Peninsula.) The northernmost tip of the Palmer Peninsula, the only portion of the Antarctic continent to jut considerably beyond the Antarctic Circle, has its antipodal point deep in Siberia, about 300 miles west of the city of Yakutsk.

But the bulk of the Antarctic continent has, as its antipodal patch,

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the Arctic ocean. This would be even truer if the Antarctic ice-sheet were not counted as dry land. Most of that section of Antarctica which serves as the antipodes for parts of Siberia probably has no true dry land under the ice.

And Hawaii, our fiftieth state? That is different. Its antipodal patch is in southern Africa. Thus, Honolulu, which is located 21.3° N, 157.8° W, has, as its antipodal point, 21.3° S, 22.2° E and that point is just a bit north of the town of Ghanzi in British Bechuanaland.

Note this. The forty-nine continental states of the United States are opposite ocean. The fiftieth state, an island-region deep in the ocean, *is opposite a continent.*

We are bound to ask the question, then: Which continental regions have, as their antipodes, other continental regions? We have already noted that North America is opposite the Indian Ocean and that Antarctica is opposite the Arctic Ocean. What about the other continents?

Let's see: The antipodal patch of Africa is entirely in the southwest Pacific, and the antipodal patch of Europe is also there but farther south. The antipodal patch of Australia is entirely in the North Atlantic.

That leaves South America and Asia. The antipodal patch of giant Asia stretches across the width of the South Pacific and laps over into southern South America. To put it more specifically, the nations of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay have as their antipodal patch a large section of eastern China, while northwestern South America is directly opposite southeast Asia.

Cape Horn, the southern tip of South America, stretches so far south, that its antipodal point reaches (symmetrically) so far north as to fall into south central Siberia near a town called Tsipikan.

Is all this coincidence? Why is it that continents are almost invariably opposite oceans on our globe?

For one thing, the continental land areas make up only 30 percent of the surface of the globe, which means that it is much more likely that a section of ocean, rather than a section of continent, will be antipodal to any point on a continent. Then, too, we must consider the peculiar distribution of land on the Earth.

Imagine, to begin with, a planet divided into two hemispheres, one of which is entirely land and the other entirely water. In that case, every bit of land would have as its antipodal point a stretch of water, even though the land surface made up 50 percent of the planet.

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Oddly enough, this is almost the case with the earth. If you manipulate a globe of the earth so that you center the Pacific Ocean in your direction, you will find you are staring at a hemisphere that is almost entirely water. The only continental land areas visible would be Australia, Antarctica, and the rims of Asia and North America. With the earth's land surface squeezed almost entirely into a single hemisphere, it is no wonder that continental areas so rarely lie opposite continental areas.

But, then, why is the Earth's land surface squeezed almost entirely into a single hemisphere? One possibility is that they are correct who visualize a primitive earth in which the entire land surface made up a single gigantic continent ("Pangaea"). Pangaea broke up and the fragments drifted apart but even after some billions of years the drifting has not carried matters to the point where the dry land has gotten much beyond the single hemisphere within which it originated.

Apparently, South America has drifted far enough to allow a portion of itself to be directly opposite a portion of Asia. The continents of Australia and Antarctica ought to have found continental opposition for themselves, too, but through a strange coincidence (or is it a coincidence?) both have found themselves antipodal to stretches of the new ocean that formed, gradually, between the major fragments of Pangaea as they drifted apart.

Yet if that is the case: Why did Earth's land surface originate as a single continent? What caused this odd asymmetry in Earth's development?—Frankly, I don't know, so we might just as well leave the problem at this point.

I would like to include in this article a table of a sort you cannot find (to my knowledge) anywhere else. It will include some of the important cities of the earth, their latitude and longitude, and the latitude and longitude of their antipodal point. I don't include all the cities by any means, and my humble apologies are hereby tendered to the inhabitants of any of the omitted cities.

City	*Location*		*Antipodal Point*	
	Lat.	*Long.*	*Lat.*	*Long.*
Leningrad, U.S.S.R.	59.9 N	30.3 E	59.9 S	149.7 W
Moscow, U.S.S.R.	55.7 N	37.5 E	55.7 S	142.5 W
Berlin, Germany	52.5 N	13.4 E	52.5 S	166.6 W
London, England	51.5 N	0	51.5 S	180
Paris, France	48.8 N	2.3 E	48.8 S	177.7 W

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City	Location		Antipodal Point	
	Lat.	Long.	Lat.	Long.
Budapest, Hungary	47.5 N	19.3 E	47.5 S	160.7 W
Rome, Italy	41.9 N	12.5 E	41.9 S	167.5 W
Chicago, U.S.A.	41.8 N	87.6 W	41.8 S	92.4 E
Istanbul, Turkey	41.0 N	29.0 E	41.0 S	151.0 W
New York, U.S.A.	40.5 N	73.5 W	40.5 S	106.5 E
Madrid, Spain	40.4 N	3.7 W	40.4 S	176.3 E
Philadelphia, U.S.A.	40.0 N	75.1 W	40.0 S	104.9 E
Peking, China	38.8 N	116.5 E	38.8 S	63.5 W
Seoul, Korea	37.7 N	127.0 E	37.7 S	53.0 W
Teheran, Iran	35.7 N	51.4 E	35.7 S	128.6 W
Tokyo, Japan	35.5 N	139.8 E	35.5 S	40.2 W
Los Angeles, U.S.A.	34.0 N	118.2 W	34.0 S	61.8 E
Shanghai, China	31.3 N	121.5 E	31.3 S	58.5 W
Cairo, U.A.R.	30.5 N	31.3 E	30.5 S	148.7 W
Canton, China	23.1 N	113.3 E	23.1 S	66.7 W
Calcutta, India	22.5 N	88.3 E	22.5 S	91.7 W
Mexico City, Mexico	19.5 N	99.1 W	19.5 S	80.9 E
Bombay, India	18.9 N	72.8 E	18.9 S	107.2 W
Saigon, South Vietnam	10.8 N	106.7 E	10.8 S	73.3 W
Singapore, Singapore	1.3 N	103.8 E	1.3 S	76.2 W
Djakarta, Indonesia	6.1 S	106.9 E	6.1 N	73.1 W
Sydney, Australia	33.9 S	151.2 E	33.9 N	28.8 W
Buenos Aires, Argentina	34.6 S	58.3 W	34.6 N	121.7 E

With the table completed, here are a few interesting tidbits about antipodal points. (I don't pretend I'll present an exhaustive list of such tidbits. If any Gentle Reader has one of interest, I hope he sends it in.)

The antipodes of London falls on the 180° meridian well south of the equator, about 600 miles southeast of New Zealand as a matter of fact. The nearest land of any sort to London's antipodal point consists of a group of rocky islands with a total area about that of Manhattan. They belong to New Zealand and are located some 150 miles northwest of London's antipodal point. And what is the name of this group of islands? Aw, come on. Guess!

Give up? Okay, they're the Antipodes Islands.

As for Shanghai, China, its antipodal point falls on the boundary of Uruguay and Argentina, just about 225 miles due north of Buenos Aires. I'm sure that this is the most remarkable pair of nearly antipodal cities, since Shanghai has a population of about 7,000,000 and Buenos

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Aires one of about 3,000,000. This is the only case of antipodal cities with each possessing more than a million in population. The antipodal point of Peking, China, is only about 80 miles west of Bahia Blanca, Argentina. This is an even closer example of sizable antipodal cities, but Bahia Blanca is no giant. Its population is about 120,000.

We ought to mention the antipodal point of Canton, China, too, since it is that which started this article. It is not at Canton, Illinois, of course, or anywhere in North America. Instead, it is on the South American continent, almost exactly at the point where the boundaries of Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia meet.

The antipodal point of Sydney, Australia is in the North Atlantic about 250 miles south of the Azores Islands.

The antipodal piont of Djakarta, Indonesia, is in the Colombian Andes, about 125 miles north of Bogota. That of Singapore is in eastern Ecuador, among the headwaters of the Amazon River.

Finally, the antipodal point of Saigon, South Vietnam, is in central Peru, also in the headwaters of the Amazon. I mention this last item only so that those who have had enough of the present unpleasantness will know exactly where to go to get as far away as possible.

And let me know when you're leaving. I may join you.

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'Tis the season once again, and if SF magazines don't quite lend themselves to gala Christmas issues, it doesn't mean we're not having a spirited time here in the office. Meanwhile, here's a story about the ultimate Christmas sell-out—Christmas Eve in the Green Pastures Room of an orbiting nightclub, complete with baromat, buxom angels and a new singing group called the Celestial Seven. Awful. Now you'll have to pardon us; that red package the boy just placed on our desk turned out to be Chivas, 12-years-old. Cheers!

KINGDOM COME, INC.

by Robert F. Young

FOR SOME REASON I FAIL TO notice this guy until he comes into the Seventh Heaven baromat, which is strange, because during the early part of the evening I always station myself at the Pearly Gates whenever a shuttleship comes up from Earth and greet the customers. That's why everybody calls me Pete, when my real name is Charley. It's strange also because he isn't the sort of guy anybody would be likely to overlook. Not only because he's tall and thin and distinguished looking and has real class, but because his face is so sad. You never saw a man with such a sad face. It's as though he is convinced that the world is coming to an end and feels sorry for everybody in it, including himself.

He walks across the room and sits down on a stool not far from where I am leaning on the counter talking to Henry the Hustler and, after a quick look over his shoulder, orders a glass of sarsaparilla. It's the first time the baromat has ever had a call for such a concoction, its banks of lights go on and off like crazy, and it appears for a moment that it is going to throw an electronic fit, but finally it calms down, and the little window in front of the stranger opens up and the drink comes out. He is wearing a quiet gray business suit which is a little the worse for wear, a black string tie, and plain black oxfords. There is nothing fancy about him at all, but that's part of what I mean by real class. It's something you can't put your

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finger on, but you can see it when it's there. I'm what you call a dresser myself, and I wouldn't dream of wearing a tie that didn't match my socks. But I never fool anybody, least of all myself. I have a full-length mirror in my suite, and every time I get dressed for my tour of duty, which starts at eight at night and ends at five in the morning, I take a good long look at myself, and all I ever see is a spaceclub-station manager who draws a big fat paycheck every week and who goes in for bourbon and big blondes.

Anyway, it's this guy's class that starts me to wondering what he is doing in a place like the Seventh Heaven, because it makes him stand out from the rest of the customers like a glass of champagne on a barful of beers. Big Tony, I reflect, has seven Heavens working for him up here in the sky, but Big Tony doesn't own the sky, and there's nothing to stop somebody else from orbiting a few spaceclub stations of their own. So maybe this guy is a billionaire promoter who is doing a little scouting around with the idea in mind of going into the Heaven business himself, and if he is, I better find out ahead of time.

So I walk down the counter to where he is sitting and introduce myself and say, "Welcome to the Seventh Heaven Club. Will you do me the honor of having a drink on the house, seeing that this is the first time you've ever visited our celestial establishment and seeing also that there are only two more days left before Christmas?"

He says his name is Mike, and that no thanks, he doesn't care for another sarsaparilla right now. He has a soft sad voice, and he brings out his words with an almost bell-like clearness. For some reason, I take a liking to him right away. "Have you visited any of our other Heavens?" I ask politely.

"No," he says, shaking his head, "this is the first one I've entered to date."

"Well, you'll never enter a better one," I tell him. "This one is the best of the lot. That's because it was built last. When you build something last you can profit from the mistakes you made before and work in a lot of improvements you might not have thought of otherwise."

"Yes, that's very true."

I am reasonably convinced by now that orbiting a few Heavens of his own is as remote from Mike's mind as the Andromeda galaxy is from Timbuktu and that he is visiting the Seventh Heaven for no other reason than to get his mind off his troubles. So I ask, "Like me to show you around the place?"

"Why yes," he says, "I'd be delighted."

I take him to the Green Pastures Room first. It's the second largest compartment in the space-

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club station and when you step inside your first thought is that you really are in Heaven. The deck is covered with wall-to-wall carpeting that looks and feels and smells exactly like green grass. The ceiling is perspectivized to look like a blue sky, and little white clouds suspended on invisible wires drift back and forth in an imaginary wind. Also, there's an artificial sun which is so cleverly perspectivized that it looks as though it's a million miles away instead of only fifty feet. All four walls are covered with three-dimensional electro-murals which blend with the floor and the ceiling and make it seem as though the green grass and the blue sky extend for miles and miles and miles on every side. In the distance you can see green hills with cows grazing on them. I asked Big Tony once about the cows, saying that if I remembered right, cows didn't go to Heaven, and he said, "Maybe not, but this happens ta be *my* Heaven, and if I want cows in it I'm going ta have them."

The roulette tables and the cocktail lounges are painted green and appear to be part of the natural scenery. All of the lounges are full when Mike and I come in, and as usual the roulette tables are doing a landslide business. The voices of the croupiers and the voices of the customers are pleasantly backgrounded by taped music, and angels are running this way and that, carrying trays of drinks. They're not real angels, of course, but 40-28-38 Big Tony girls wearing artificial golden wings and not much else.

Mike looks up at the sky. He stares at the green grass that seems to spread out for miles and miles and miles on every side. He glances sideways at the angels. He gapes at all the guys and the girls lounging in the cocktail lounges. He stares at the crowded roulette tables. "Gosh!" he says. And then, "No wonder."

"No wonder what?" I ask.

He looks at me with those sad blue eyes of his and then looks away. "I—I guess I'd rather not talk about it."

I can see, though, that he does want to talk about it, whatever it is, but I don't press him. I find myself liking him more and more by the minute. "Come on," I say, "I'll show you the Still Waters Room."

The Still Waters Room *is* the largest compartment in the space-club station. It's similar to the Green Pastures Room except, as you'd naturally expect, water plays the leading role instead of grass. There are ponds and little lakes and brooks and winding streams and all of them are so clear and sparkling that just to look at them is enough to make you want to go for a swim. That's what the guys and girls are doing when Mike and I come in. Oh, a few of

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them are sitting on the grassy banks, chug-a-lugging champagne out of mini-magnums, but the majority already have their clothes off and are frolicking in the H-Two-Oh.

There is a bewildered expression on Mike's face. "Aren't—aren't they supposed to walk by them?" he says.

I don't catch what he means at first. "Walk by what?" I ask.

"By the Still Waters. It doesn't seem quite appropriate for them to be ah—ah—"

"Oh, that," I say. "That's a mere technicality. The Still Waters are there—that's the main thing. If they want to walk by them, they can, and if they want to horse around in them, they can do that too. It's up to them. So long as they pay the tab, it makes no difference to Big Tony what they do."

"Big Tony?"

"He's the wheel. Owns all the seven Heavens. Real nice guy."

A thoughtful look comes into Mike's eyes, driving out some of the sadness. He glances over his shoulder and then back at me. "Do—do you think—"

"Do I think what?"

"Oh, never mind," he says, and the sadness comes back. "It was just a thought. I'd never make out anyway."

I let it go at that. I have a hunch he'll return to the subject before long, and I'm right. After I have shown him the fun rooms and we are walking along the corridor that gives access to the crew's quarters, the main hub tube, the angels' rooms, my suite, the special suite set aside for Big Tony, and circles back to the baromat, he throws a quick look over his shoulder and then says to me in a low voice, "Do—do you think Big Tony would give me a job?"

Immediately I am all business. "Any experience?" I ask.

"In—in a way."

We have reached the end of the corridor by this time, and we enter the baromat and find two vacant stools and sit down on them. I order a bourbon and water, and he orders a sarsaparilla. "In what way?" I ask.

He takes a nervous sip and sets his glass back down on the counter. "I—that is, my six brothers and I—used to run a place analogous to this one."

"What do you mean—analogous to it?"

"Like it, and yet not like it. But I've had considerable experience in the managerial line, and—"

I can contain my enthusiasm no longer. "Why, that's great!" I tell him. "Big Tony's looking for someone to manage Heaven number 5. The guy managing it now can't adjust himself to centrifugal grav and keeps getting spacesick all the time and wants to quit, and Big Tony said he'd let him just as soon as he could find somebody to take his place."

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"Do—do you think he'd consider—"

"I don't see why not. Look, he's going to be here tomorrow night—every Christmas Eve he plays Santa Claus in one of his Heavens, and this Christmas Eve it's going to be this one, and he'll arrive a day early. So as soon as he shows, I'll speak to him about you and arrange an interview. That is, if you can make it tomorrow night—"

"Can I!" There are tears in the poor guy's eyes. But even though there is sadness in them too, I can see that he has taken out a new lease on life. He even forgets to look over his shoulder. "Pete, I'll never forget you for this!" he says. "Why, it'll be like old times, almost. Back in harness again, with a place of my own, and new customers to greet and take care of and—and—why Pete, you've made me whole again!"

His gratitude embarrasses me, especially in view of the possibility that he may not get the job after all. So I call over Pinky MacFarlane, who is one of the hostess angels we keep on hand to entertain the stag customers, and introduce him to her, thinking that an angel is just what he needs to relax him. Then I excuse myself, saying that I have to go over the books, and retire to my office.

When I return to the baromat a couple of hours later, Mike is gone, so I naturally assume that he and Pinky have discovered some mutual interests and are sojourning in one of the fun rooms. Then who should come up to me but Pinky herself, all alone and carrying a big chip on her shoulder. "You've got your nerve," she says, "saddling me with a yech like that! Where'd you find him—living on an asteroid?"

This enrages me. "Is this the thanks I get for introducing you to a real gentleman for a change and providing you with an opportunity to better yourself culturally?" I ask. "Where is he now?"

"I don't know where he is," Pinky says, "and I don't care. He didn't even offer to buy me a drink—he just sat there sipping that yechy sarsaparilla of his and staring at my wings. And when I said, 'What's the matter—don't you approve of my pinions?', he said, 'I'm sorry, Miss MacFarlane—I didn't mean to be rude. It's just that I'm having a hard time adjusting myself to some of the more literal aspects of this new order of things.' So I ast him, 'What's new about a girl wearing wings? Us Big Tony girls have been wearing them ever since Heaven number 1 opened up, and—' "

"Never mind all that," I interrupt her. "Just tell me where he went."

"I told you, I don't know. I talked him into going to the G.P. Room, thinking maybe he'd loosen up with some of his LBJ's, but we never got there. While we were

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passing the Pearly Gates, he dropped behind me, and when I looked around, he was gone."

"Probably took an early shuttleship back to Earth," I muse aloud. "He looked kind of tired."

"But there weren't any shuttleships in the boat bay. I know, because I looked."

"Probably the one he took had already pulled out."

This must be the case, because I see no more of him that night. By the time I turn in at 5:00 A.M. I have pretty much forgotten all about him, but I remember him right away when Big Tony comes into my suite late that afternoon while I am eating breakfast. "Big Tony," I say, "I've got just the man for that number 5 spot of yours," and I tell him the whole story.

"Sure, Pete," he says, after I finish. "I'll talk ta him. You bring him inta my soot just as soon as he shows up."

Mike arrives on the 8:15 shuttleship, but it's like the night before: even though I am stationed at the Pearly Gates to welcome the customers, I don't see him till afterwards when he walks into the baromat. I can tell that he's real nervous, because he keeps glancing over his shoulder every other step he takes. "What did Big Tony say, Pete?" he asks in a low voice, joining me at the counter where I am keeping company with a big blond angel named Doris. "Will he see me?"

"Take it easy, Mike," I say. "You've got yourself all worked up over nothing. Come on—I'll take you to him."

Big Tony is in his dining room eating dinner. He waves us into two chairs with what's left of a leg of lamb. The table is spread with squab, lobster, pheasant, duck, suckling pig, sweetbreads, smoked whitefish, veal cutlets, grapes, oranges, tangerines, apples, corn-on-the-cob, asparagus, rolls, butter, and sundry other items. It is a large table, but Big Tony makes it seem small. That's because he's such a big man. Sometimes after a meal he goes as high as 550 pounds. His face is real broad, but the flesh doesn't sag the way you'd think it would. That's because he's still young yet.

Whenever he talks, his face takes on a kind of glow. Some people say that this is because there's a film of sweat covering it. But I know better. The glow comes from inside. It's as though there's a big bonfire burning in him that he has to keep refueling all the time and as though the glow from it comes right through his skin. Let me tell you, it takes a big man like Big Tony with a big bonfire burning in him to create seven Heavens and hang them up in the sky.

"So this is Mike," he says, spearing a squab with his fork. "Pete here says you used to run a place of your own. That right?"

"Yes sir," Mike says. "That is,

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I used to help run one. Last week, my six brothers and I decided to get out, and we did."

"Why?"

"Because business had fallen off to a point where it was no longer practical for us to stay. Oh, there's still our old customers, of course, but they don't need us any more."

"What made it fall off?"

Mike shifts uneasily in his chair. "I—I guess it was our entry fee that was mostly to blame. Even in the beginning, people found it pretty steep. But just the same a lot of them paid it, and we couldn't have lowered it in any case. When things started to go bad, we thought that what with the population explosion and the demand for higher and higher education that they'd pick up again. But they didn't. They just got worse and worse and worse, and finally my brothers and I looked reality in the face and got out."

Big Tony is working on the drumstick of a duck. "What makes you think you could show a profit on one of my places when you couldn't show a profit on your own?"

"Why, I hadn't thought about it in exactly that way, sir. But I feel certain I could succeed."

"A feeling ain't enough." Big Tony begins gesturing with his fork. "You failed once—you'll fail again. And I'll tell you why. You don't know the three golden rules. I'll tell them ta you but it won't do no good, because you won't go by them. You can't go by them, because you're built upside down. Here they are—listen. *One*: give people what they really want. Ta hell with what they say they want and ta hell with what they pretend they want and ta hell with what you think they should want. Give them what they *really* want. *Two*: price it low enough so they can afford it and high enough so that they'll think it's something special. *Three*: make sure they can see it, feel it, and smell it. If they can't, they won't buy it. The world is full of businessmen who failed just because they couldn't follow those three simple rules. You expect me ta hire a businessman like that ta manage one of my space-clubs?"

"But Big Tony," I butt in, "Mike needs a job and—"

Big Tony looks at me with a pained expression on his face. "Did I say I wasn't going to give him one?" he asks.

"No-no, you didn't, but—"

"Like you told me, Pete, this guy's got real class. I'd have rocks in my head the size of asteroids if I didn't know just by looking at him that I'd get my money's worth even if I hired him just ta walk around the place and do nothing. He's window dressing—real window dressing. But I'd have even bigger rocks in my head if I made a manager out of him, because

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manage, he can't." Big Tony looks at Mike. "What *can* you do?" he asks.

Mike throws a quick glance over his shoulder. "I—I can sing a little," he says. "Hymns and carols and stuff like that."

Big Tony winces, but he's game. "Okay—let's hear something."

Mike gets to his feet. He throws another quick glance over his shoulder, then he clears his throat. "This one's called *In the Garden,*" he says, and lets loose with the sweetest, most heavenly, Irish tenor you have ever heard in all your life.

Big Tony sits spellbound till the hymn is finished. So do I. Then Big Tony says, "Holy Mackerel!"

"I'm afraid I don't do very well, just by myself," Mike says apologetically. "You see, I'm used to working with my brothers. Gabe, he plays the trumpet, while Raf and the rest of us sing. We've never performed in public, though, and—"

"*They* sing like that, too?" Big Tony asks incredulously.

"Well no, not exactly. Actually, Raf stands head and shoulders above the rest of us in the singing department. He—"

"Are your brothers looking for a job, too?"

"Oh yes—they're as desperate for one as I am. You see—"

"Well tell them they're hired," Big Tony says. "Tell them they start tomorrow night." He turns to me. "Do you see it, Pete?"

I don't yet—not quite—but I am beginning to. "I am beginning to, Big Tony," I say.

He pops a bunch of grapes into his mouth and starts peeling an orange. His eyes are shining, but the effect is marred by the folds of fat that surround them. "The Green Pastures Room," he says. "Tomorrow night. Christmas Eve. That's when we'll launch them. With carols. It's a natural. Do you see it, Pete—do you see it?"

I have the picture now. "We'll build a special platform for them," I say excitedly. "A stage. Right next to where we're going to put the Christmas tree. And we'll spring them as a surprise."

"Ha! We'll do better than that. We'll put them on TV. I'll buy the time. I don't care how much it costs. We'll let the whole world know what it's like to go to Seventh Heaven. We'll show them we've got class up here—real class. And after Christmas we'll get Mike and his brothers working on some modern numbers and start rotating them between the spaceclubs . . . How big a Christmas tree you order, Pete?"

"A twenty-foot spruce."

"Get a bigger one. The bigger the better. There's room enough for a forty-footer, easy."

"Right, Big Tony. I'll have the angels trim it tomorrow afternoon.

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And I'll fix up Mike and his brothers with some costumes with wings."

"Big golden ones," Big Tony says. "The bigger the better. And have the crew retract the hull above the ceiling so the stars can shine through the sky . . . were you going to say something, Mike? You're getting a thousand a week to start, you know."

"I—I was just clearing my throat," Mike says.

"Good," says Big Tony. "It's all set then. Take care of everything, Pete."

Well I want to tell you, I am a busy man for the next twenty-four hours. First there is the TV time to arrange for. This takes a long stint on the station-to-Earth phone and requires all my ingenuity and persuasive powers, but finally I land a prime-time 9:30-10:00 spot on a major network for the following evening. Then there are my regular duties to keep me jumping till five o'clock in the morning, at which time I go to bed. But I don't sleep long, because Mike and his six brothers show up at eleven o'clock when no shuttleship is supposed to be scheduled and barge into my bedroom and wake me up. His six brothers look and act a lot like him. All of them have the same sadness in their eyes and all of them keep glancing over their shoulders every two or three minutes. I set up a rehearsal for them in Big Tony's suite, and when Big Tony and I hear those six heavenly voices and that out-of-this-world trumpet, we know we've got it made.

I get Earth on the line again and change the Christmas-tree order from a twenty to a forty-footer. Then I superintend building a stage for the Celestial Seven, which is the name Big Tony and I have agreed upon for the seven brothers. When the tree arrives on the two-o'clock shuttle, I superintend putting it up and afterwards I supervise the angels while they are trimming it. Then I have to superintend the decorating of the Green Pastures Room. Then I have to get hold of the spaceclub tailor and have him let out Big Tony's Santa Claus suit, which for some reason has shrunk since last Christmas. Then I have to console Pinky MacFarlane, who has been eavesdropping at the door of Big Tony's suite where the Celestial Seven are still rehearsing, and talk her out of jettisoning herself because she feels so bad about the terrible things she said about Mike before she knew what a heavenly voice he has. Then I have to get hold of the station's maintenance crew and put them to work retracting the hull above the G.P. Room ceiling, which, after you disconnect the perspectivization field, turn out the sun, and take down the clouds, is little more than a concave glass slab.

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Then I have to choose a costume from among the several which the station's *couturier* suggests for the Celestial Seven, and talk them into having themselves fitted, which for some reason they are reluctant to do. Then I have to check the automatic kitchen and the baromat to see that they are in good working order and are well supplied with the staffs of life. Then I have to arbitrate an argument which arises among the angels over which of them is going to turn the Christmas-tree lights on. I want to tell you, managing a Heaven can be an awful headache sometimes.

But at last everything is all set. The stage has been built, the tree has been trimmed, the lights have been turned on, the angels have stopped arguing, the hull above the G.P. Room ceiling has been retracted, Big Tony has squeezed into his Santa Claus suit, the Celestial Seven have gotten into their costumes, the baromat has been oiled, the mistletoe has been hung, the Pearly Gates have been polished, Peace is the password, and we are all ready to hum.

The TV crew show up at 7:30, accompanied by the professional pitchman who is going to announce the show, and get their gear into place. The customers begin arriving at 8:15. I greet them at the Pearly Gates, wearing a new azure suit for the occasion, and a new commodore's cap. Shuttleship after shuttleship pulls in, and people pour into the baromat and the Green Pastures Room, and spill over into the Still Waters Room—those of them, that is, who have had all the Christmas cheer they can hold for the moment and wish to work some of it off. By nine o'clock we are so packed we couldn't take another soul on board if we had to.

I adjourn to the Green Pastures Room and make my way through the customers and the angels and the roulette tables to the lounge where Big Tony is sitting in his Santa Claus suit with an angel on each knee. I squeeze in between him and his bag, which is filled with mini-magnums of champagne which he will pass out at midnight. There are red-and-green lamps on all the tables, but the main source of light is the stars. They hang in the sky like candles, and the slow spinning of the spaceclub station makes it seem as though they are drifting by of their own free will. A wedge of Earth appears and for a while the green coastline of North America is visible, bounded by the blueness of the Pacific Ocean; then the wedge is gone, and stars have taken its place.

At 9:25 the TV pitchman comes over to the lounge and taps me on the shoulder. The time has come. I snap my fingers, and the taped music that has been providing a background for the proceed-

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ings goes off, and an inbuilt lens in the glass ceiling focuses the starlight on the stage. The Celestial Seven move out of the shadows and step up into the circle of light, and the TV cameras advance on their dollies. Presently the pitchman steps in front of the Seven and raises his hand for silence. We are on the air.

He gives a short speech about the Seventh Heaven Club, bragging it to the skies and saying that people don't know what true bliss is until they enter its Pearly Gates. Then he brags up the six other Heavens, and then he brags up the proprietor. While he is doing so, one of the TV cameras rolls over to our lounge and focuses its glassy eye on Big Tony in his Santa Claus suit and on the two angels sitting on his knees. "And now," concludes the pitchman, "I will introduce without further preamble a new singing group called the Celestial Seven, who will regale you with Christmas carols in honor of the festive season."

He retires into the shadows and the Celestial Seven are alone on the stage. I can see that they are nervous, but I can also see that they are determined to go through with the performance and bring it off with a bang. The costumes I have chosen for them are blue and silver and covered with iridescent sequins, and are they ever terrific! And those big golden wings! Not everybody can wear wings. Myself, for instance. They do nothing for me at all. But on Mike and his brothers, they look like they belong.

Gabe raises his trumpet and cuts loose with a beautiful lick, and it's like Bix Beiderbecke and Bunny Berrigan and Louie Armstrong all rolled into one. The six heavenly voices are lifted to the stars . . . *"Si-i-lent night, ho-o-ly night, all is calm, all is bright"* . . . The Christmas tree is like a big bright bonfire. It makes me think of the big bonfire that burns in Big Tony and provides him with the energy he needs to carry on his work, and I feel a deep sense of pride that I am one of his managers . . . *"Slee-eep in heavenly peace—Slee-eep in heavenly peace"* . . . A big tear rolls down Big Tony's painted cheek and splashes on his fur collar.

The heavenly voices are lifted again. And again and again. It *Came Upon the Midnight Clear* . . . *The First Nowell* . . . *Joy to the World!* . . . *O Come, All Ye Faithful* . . . *Angels, from the Realms of Glory* . . . *What Child is This?* . . .

They save *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* till the last—

"Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King!—"

I don't know what makes me glance up at the stars, but I do. And I see this great big UFO hovering above the station. At least I

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think it is a UFO. It is shaped like a gigantic finger, and the finger is pointing straight down at the stage. The Celestial Seven see it also, and Gabe's trumpet gives a despairing squawk, and the six heavenly voices gurgle and die out. By this time everybody else has seen the finger, and the Green Pastures Room is silent as death.

Suddenly somebody begins to scream. It is Mike. He is staring up at the pointing finger and frantically waving his arms. "No! No!" he cries. "You don't understand! We had to do what we did. We couldn't compete any longer. Only fools fight on when the battle is lost. At least this way we'll do *some* good. At least this way—"

This bolt of brightness shoots out of the pointing finger then, and stabs down and bathes the stage and the Celestial Seven with the most hellish radiance you ever saw in your life. The Celestial Seven turn red. Then orange. Then yellow. Then green. Then blue. Then indigo. Then violet. And then the bolt is gone and so is the pointing finger, and Mike and his six brothers are lying motionlessly on the stage.

I get to them first. Mike is the only one left alive. I pillow his head on my knee. "Mike, Mike," I say.

He looks up at me, but his eyes don't focus on me. It's as though he's looking right through me. "I never thought it would end like this," he says.

"You never thought what would end like this?" I ask.

"Armageddon," he says, and dies.

Now I ask you, what does he mean by that?

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